

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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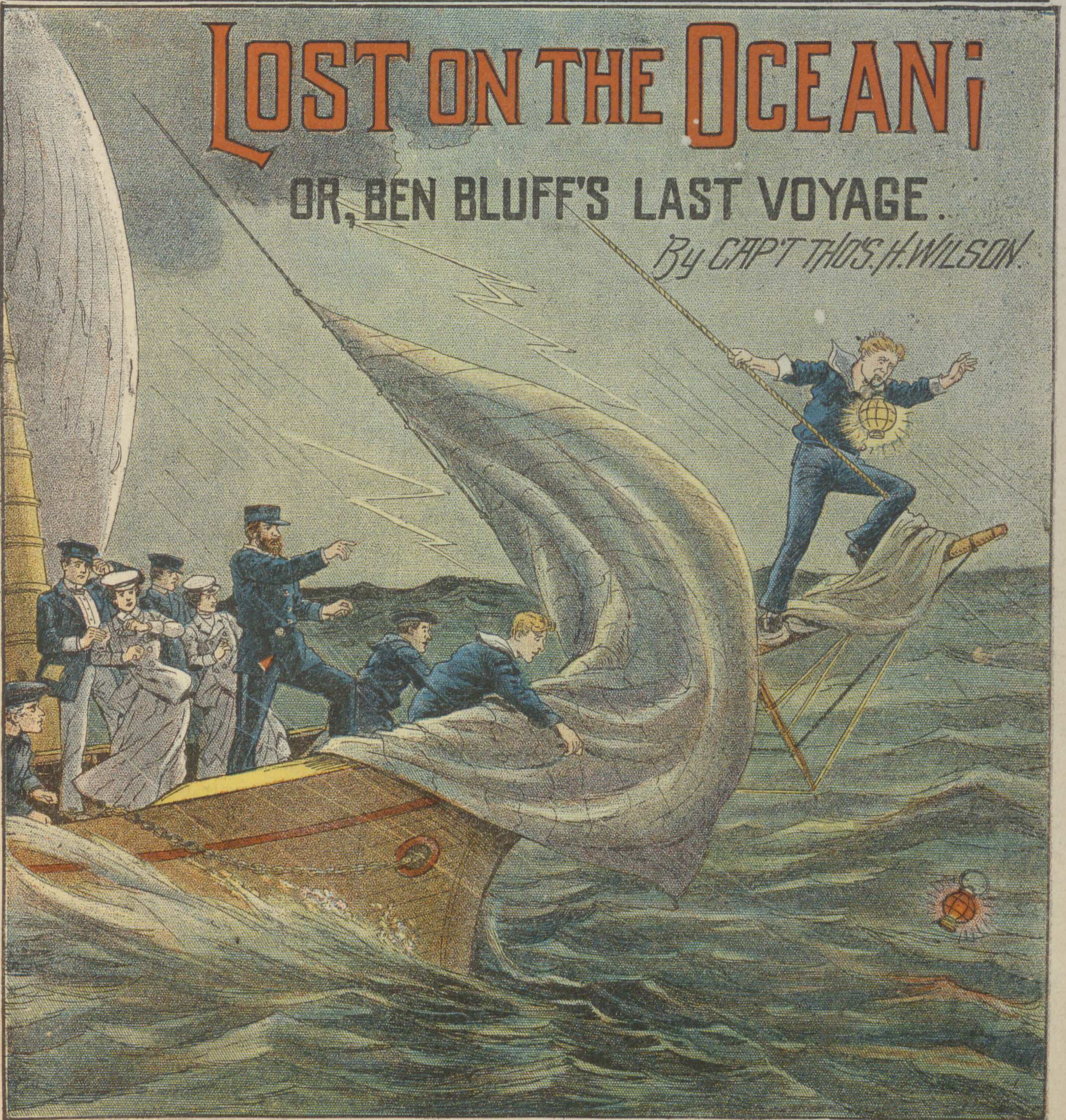
NEW YORK, MAY 7. 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

LOST ON THE OCEAN;

OR, BEN BLUFF'S LAST VOYAGE.

By CAPT THOS. H. WILSON.



"What do you see, Jim?" called Ben Bluff. "Nothing at all, sor," answered Brophy, waving the two lanterns back and forth. There came a sudden flash of lightning, and in his fright he let one of the lanterns fall.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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Complete Stories of Adventure.

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NEW YORK, MAY 7, 1902.

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CHAPTER I.

BEN BLUFF AND HIS SHIP ON SHORE

Ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong!

It was eight bells, and as the last stroke sounded, sharp and clear, a gruff voice was heard exclaiming:

"Eight bells! Now, then, where's the watch? Turn up there, you lubbers, or somebody'll be put in irons!"

The scene was not the deck of some trim ship, as one would naturally suppose, but the sitting-room of a neat cottage on the New England coast, whose front windows looked out upon a snug harbor, where, among other craft, a trim yacht lay at anchor.

Ben Bluff was the owner of the cottage and also of the yacht, a goodly sum in the bank, and a strip of land behind the house.

He did not call it a cottage, however, for that would not have been nautical enough to suit a grizzled old sea dog like Ben Bluff.

The house was his ship, and everything about it was ship-shape, from the figurehead over the door to the rudder post at the back gate, and he was mightily offended if any but nautical terms were used in his presence.

The windows were ports, and they were always battened down in time of storms, the table was lashed to the floor to prevent its sliding about, the glassware and crockery rested in racks to keep from fetching away, and, in short, everything was the same as though the cottage were afloat on the ocean.

All the beds were built against the walls, like a ship's bunks, the kitchen was the galley and the parlor was the cabin. The floors were decks and the stairs were companions, the cellar was the hold, and the roof the hurricane deck; and so it went all about the house.

The servants were divided into watches and were obliged to serve their regular four hours, on and off, just as if they had been at sea, and for any breach of discipline, any sleeping during the watch on deck, the skipper of this stationary ship always meted out a severe punishment.

Ben Bluff was as peculiar in appearance as he was in his manner, and, once seen, he could never be forgotten.

He had lost the lower half of his right leg, having left it in the jaws of a monster shark in the South Seas, replacing it with one of oak, while his left arm was only a stump, the greater part of it having been shot away during an encounter with Malay pirates, the sleeve of his coat being doubled over upon his shoulder, for wooden arms were useless, and cork ones too expensive to suit Ben Bluff.

These curtailments of these most useful members gave Ben Bluff rather a one-sided, or rather lopsided, look, for his good leg had a tendency to swerve him to the left, while his whole arm would naturally steer him to the right, so that in the end he never went in a straight line in reaching anything, but arrived at his destination by a series of tacks, first to port, and then to starboard.

His way, his looks and his walk were therefore peculiar to himself, and no one in the town where he lived could take an oath that they had ever seen just such another as old Ben Bluff.

He had given up the sea as a means of livelihood, but he had

his yacht, and in her he would make voyages of greater or less length, up and down the coast, and sometimes well out to sea, his usual companions being his two nephews, bright fellows of seventeen and eighteen, with an extra man or so by way of a crew, the negro cook, and sometimes the Irish maid-of-all-work as steward.

The yacht was a thoroughly sea-worthy craft, for Ben Bluff would have sailed in no other, and was perfectly capable of going around the world if her skipper had so desired, being ninety feet long, high and dry forward and well shaped aft, with everything, aloft and aloft, that could induce to one's comfort and safety.

As eight bells struck on this bright June morning, Ben Bluff sidled into the sitting-room from his own cabin at one side, and, in stentorian tones, demanded to know why the watch did not turn out.

A weather-beaten tar, not quite so old as Ben Bluff, and having all his limbs, entered the front door, touched his cap and said:

"Eight bells is struck, sir, but I don't see no sign of the watch."

"Whose turn is it on deck, Mr. Wattles?" growled Ben Bluff.

"Your two nevvies, sir; but they're cruising around town and haven't come aboard."

"Where's that black swabb, Joe, Mr. Wattles? It's his watch on deck, isn't it?"

"Yas'r, an' here I is, sah," said a voice at the front gate, and a very black and extremely fat negro walked up the trim gravel walk a moment later.

"Where's your manners, you lubber?" roared Ben Bluff, taking the starboard tack and rushing at the negro. "Salute your captain, you black rascal, or I'll order you put in irons!"

"Yas'r, suttinly, sah; blessed ef I didn't clean fo'git it," and Black Joe touched his hat in true man-of-war style and stood on one side.

"It's your business not to forget it, you lubberly son of a belaying pin!" roared the skipper. "Now, then, Mr. Wattles, call all hands."

The mate blew a shrill blast on a whistle or pipe, which he carried on the end of a cord around his neck, and then stood near the gate opposite the skipper.

In a moment two men dressed as sailors came hurrying around the side of the house from the garden, and ranged themselves alongside the mate between that functionary and the negro.

"Aye, aye, sir, we're coming!" cried a merry voice from the road, and then, with a bound that cleared the fence, the skipper's two nephews, Jack and Dick Port, entered the yard and took their places on the line.

"What do you mean by coming on deck in that fashion, you young mutineers?" bellowed Ben Bluff. "You'll come in at the gangway the next time, or lose your liberty on shore for a week."

"Aye, aye, sir; we'll do better next time, sir," said Dick Port, the younger of the two brothers, with a merry twinkle in his brown eyes.

He was a born joker, and could pick out the fun in a situation as readily as a cat can see a mouse in the night, but was, withal, a good sailor, a jolly companion and a stanch friend.

He was the only one in the assemblage that did not treat Ben Bluff's eccentricities in a serious light; all the rest, even to Joe, wearing the most solemn looks.

The two sailors who stood alongside the mate were nearly as comical in appearance as Ben Bluff himself, one being a short, fat, red-headed, cross-eyed, bow-legged Irishman, and the other a lean, lank, sandy-haired, knock-kneed German, the two being as illy assorted a pair as would be a sail needle and a marlin spike.

Ben Bluff stood in the walk, after having made a tack to port, glanced along the line, and said:

"Ther's a hand missing. Mr. Wattles, it's one of your watch. What does this mean?"

"It's the cook, sir," replied the mate. "Reckon she's on duty just now."

"Don't make no difference," stormed Ben Bluff. "All hands means all hands, and not all hands except the cook."

"Then what makes people say 'all hands and the cook,' Uncle Ben?" asked Dick Port.

"You never heard me say it, you sea dandy," retorted Ben Bluff. "Mr. Wattles?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send some one for that mutinous cook."

"Aye, aye, sir. Joe, go fetch the cook."

"Golly, I reckon she be pretty mad," said the negro, while a grin overspread his dusky countenance.

Away he went, however, and in a few moments he returned, dragging an Irish woman by the arm, the latter protesting and cuffing him soundly with her free hand.

"Dere ain't no use ob you makin' a fuss, cook," said Joe. "It am de cap'in's orders, an' I gotter 'bey them, ev'ry time."

"Cook," said Ben Bluff, sternly, "take your place by the star-board rail. What do you mean by disobeying orders?"

"Sure, captain dear, the dinner will be spoiled intirely av yez take me away from me range at this time," cried the woman, very red in the face.

"Salute your captain, you raw recruit, or you'll get in irons," roared the strict disciplinarian.

"Begob! it's a shame to take me away, just whin I'm broilin' the mackerel," muttered the cook, saluting, "but av it's burned up it'll be no fault av mine, remimber that."

"Mr. Wattles," roared Ben Bluff.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"All hands below, and come in to dinner."

"All hands below!" cried out the red-faced mate, and the ship's company dismissed itself.

"Troth, it's all humbug, so it is," muttered Honora, the cook, as she returned to the kitchen. "The masther is goin' crazy wid his thryin' to turn the cottage into a ship, and making us all turn out ivery four hours, night and day, rain or shine. I'll not do it meself, and if it wasn't for the good wages and it bein' hard to git a place ivery day in the week, I wouldn't stay wid him. Wait till he gits married, though, and we'll see if his wife will stand all his whims. I'm thinking there'll be mutiny the first thing."

CHAPTER II.

A MUTINY AND HOW IT WAS QUELLED.

"I say, Uncle Ben," said Dick Port, as they sat down to dinner, the company being the two brothers, Ben Bluff, and Mr. Wattles, with Joe to wait upon them, "there's no reason why we shouldn't sail out of here to-morrow or to-day, in fact."

"I don't see any use in hurrying," added Jack. "We've got

all summer before us, and we can have as much fun in a lot of short cruises as in one long one."

"Oh, yes; I understand you well enough, Jack," laughed Dick, taking a bit of white, nicely broiled fish upon his fork, "You want to stay and flirt with those city girls, the Misses Waters; that's why you prefer to stay on shore."

"Well, what's the harm?" replied Jack, with a blush. "We might take them with us on a short cruise."

"Well, we ain't going on a short cruise," interposed Ben Bluff, "and we don't want no petticoats aboard. Honora will do, of course, for she's one of the crew."

"It's too bad to leave the girls behind, isn't it, Jack?" said Dick, with a grin; "particularly as Bob Clifford is going to be with 'em. He'll make it interesting, I don't——"

"Deuce take Bob Clifford," muttered Jack Port, angrily. "I'd like to break——"

"Avast there, messmates!" roared Ben Bluff. "We don't allow no cuss words on this craft, especially in the cabin. It ain't good luck. Never mind Bob Clifford, or the gals, nuther. They ain't a-going on the cruise, and we'll start early in the morning, Mr. Wattles."

"Yes, cap'n?"

"The stores is on board the Sprite?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the clearance papers made out?"

"All correct, sir."

"And everything ready?"

"Everything, sir."

"Nothing to prevent going out with the afternoon tide?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. Stand by to take orders at any moment, Mr. Wattles. I ain't going to have no nevvv of mine run away with no petticoat, I ain't, and I'll keep him clear o' them reefs," with strong emphasis, "if I have to cross the ocean to do it."

Jack and Dick were sons of Ben Bluff's sister, who had died when the boys were mere babies, leaving them in charge of her brother, whom she implored to watch over them.

Their father had died when Jack was fourteen and Dick a year younger, and since that time Ben Bluff had attended to their bringing up, paying liberally for their education, and at the same time endeavoring to make fine, manly fellows of them.

The old sea dog had always loved his sister devotedly, but she was the only woman in his own station with whom he had any patience, and against the rest of the sex he was almost bitter.

He had had a love affair of his own before the time that his sister had married; but after putting all his trust in one woman, giving all his love and confidence, and in the end having her coldly reject him for a wealthier man almost upon the eve of his marriage, he had sworn an enmity against all women, his sister alone excepted.

Every summer, since having had entire charge of the boys, he had taken them upon short cruises in a small yacht he owned, but, during the winter that had lately passed, he had purchased and fitted up the Sprite, which would enable him to make longer voyages, across the ocean, if necessary.

He had not at first felt any apprehension on the score of either of the boys marrying, but Jack was now past nineteen, and a favorite among the ladies, and it was about time that he was put at something which would leave him no recreation to devote to the opposite sex.

Dick's jesting remarks concerning the Misses Waters gave Ben Bluff alarm, for he had heard something of the same sort before, and remembered that since their arrival in the little seaport, Jack had given less of his time to his uncle and more to the village.

Ben Bluff was sincere in not wanting his nephews to marry, at least, not for several years, for he did not want them to be

deceived as he had been, and he thought that every woman who saw them would have an eye to the money they would be sure to inherit from their eccentric old uncle, caring nothing for the young fellows themselves.

He had, therefore, determined to sail at once, and not postpone their departure a single day, for fear that one of his beloved nephews might be lured away in spite of all his well laid plans.

They had expected to sail the next day, and it therefore did not make any material difference, everything on board the Sprite being in readiness, and nothing to do but call all hands, go on board, weigh anchor, and go out with the tide.

After the officers and the starboard watch had eaten dinner, the others were served, the cook eating with the rest, although it was greatly against her dignity that she consented to set at the same table with Joe the black, and only did so because Ben Bluff threatened to put her in irons if she did not.

After dinner Jack and Dick went aboard the Sprite, by order of the captain, while the latter, after their departure, said to the mate:

"Better make ready to get away on the first of the ebb, Mr. Wattles. The men don't need no getting ready, and the boys don't want more'n half an hour, I reckon."

"Weather looks kind o' squally, cap'n," said Mr. Wattles, "and we'll be going out in the face of a storm, I'm afeared. There ain't no special hurry, is there?"

The skipper swung his good leg to port, gave his arm stump a shake so as to throw it up into the wind, came about, faced the mate, and with a look as black as a thundercloud, roared out:

"If I say go out in a gale of wind, it don't mean to drop anchor, does it, Mr. Wattles?"

"No, sir; I reckon not."

"And so do I reckon not, Mr. Wattles," growled the skipper. "My orders is to get out this arternoon, and that don't mean to-morrer morning."

"Aye, aye, sir; no more it don't," muttered the mate, while the skipper stumped across the room and back, came to anchor near the table, and said:

"When is the fust of the ebb, Mr. Wattles?"

"A little arter four, sir—say six minutes."

"Then we leave here a little afore four—say seven minutes," grumbled Ben Bluff, "so's to get well out o' the bay the time the ebb sets the strongest. Them's your orders, Mr. Wattles, and I want you to see 'em carried out."

Then the skipper stumped out into the garden, where Jim Brophy, the red-headed Irishman, was sitting on a bench smoking a short pipe.

"Your watch below, Jim?" he grunted.

"It is, sor," returned the sailor, without removing his pipe from his mouth.

"Strike two bells," muttered Ben Bluff, looking at a big silver watch he carried in his fob.

Jim arose, walked leisurely forward, and struck the bell twice.

"Be on board the Sprite at six bells, Jim, you and the Dutchman. Your dunnage is on board?"

"It is, sor."

"All right," and the skipper stumped back to the house.

"Go aboard, Mr. Wattles," he growled, "and see that everything is all right. I'll be aboard myself by seven bells."

"Aye, aye, sir," muttered the mate, as he took his glazed hat from a peg and left the house.

The boys were somewhat surprised when the mate came aboard, to learn that the Sprite was to sail that afternoon, and Jack seemed somewhat chagrined.

"I had promised to take the Waters girls out sailing this afternoon," he muttered to Dick. "It's too provoking."

"Oh, well, they can get Clifford," answered Dick, mischiev-

ously, at which Jack uttered an angry exclamation and went down to his cabin to see if he had everything he wanted.

At three o'clock all hands were aboard except the skipper and black Joe, and preparations for departure were going on all around.

At a few minutes before seven bells the captain came aboard, looked all around and said:

"All ready, Mr. Wattles?"

"All except Joe, sir."

The skipper was about to make use of some strong language when Joe was seen hurrying along the little wharf, evidently in a state of great excitement.

He came quickly aboard and said hurriedly:

"Cap'n, sah, dat Irish woman up to de ho'se done mutinied. She say she won't come abo'd till mo'nin', an' dat if yo' wan' her yo' gotter come fetch her. Wha' yo' do, cap'n? Sail wifout yo' stewart?"

"Sail without her, you lubber?" thundered Ben Bluff, swinging his wooden leg around and catching Joe in the shin. "Not a bit of it. Mr. Wattles!"

"Aye," cried the mate.

"Send two men ashore and have that Irish woman brought on board, dead or alive."

"I'll go," laughed Dick, springing forward, for he anticipated some fun in the approaching adventure. "Come on, Dutch."

Dick and Yacob Snitz were soon at the house, for it was only a walk of a few minutes, and there they found Honora sitting on the front porch, Joe having locked all the doors and windows.

"Honora," said Dick, "the skipper says you must come aboard."

"Indeed, and I'll not do it. There's a storm coming up. I'm sailor enough to see that."

"But he says we are to fetch you, dead or alive."

"The triangular ould heathen!" cried the woman. "Go back and tell him I'm not going."

"Oh, no; we must obey orders. Yacob, do you see that wheelbarrow?"

"Ya; I see me dot," answered the phlegmatic German.

"Bring it here and help me get Honora in it. You heard our orders, didn't you? We want to bring her, dead or alive."

"Ya; I tink so," answered Yacob, bringing the wheelbarrow.

Between them and despite her struggles, Dick and Yacob put Honora into the barrow, and while Dick held her in, Yacob wheeled her out of the gate.

"Well, I said I wouldn't go," muttered the cook, after vainly trying to get away from Dick, "and neither have I; for going wid yer own free will and being taken is two different things, me bye."

"If we wasn't just going out, I'd put you in irons, you mutinous lubber," muttered the skipper, as the refractory cook was brought on board; "but you'll get it, my hearty. All hands stand by. Get her out as soon as you can, Mr. Wattles. It only wants a minute or two of our time!"

CHAPTER III.

THE VOYAGE BEGUN UNDER PECULIAR AUSPICES

The Sprite sailed out of the harbor with a good breeze, but despite the mate's predictions, there was no present sign of a storm, and the tidy little craft skimmed over the waves like a bird.

In the pantry Honora began the preparations for dinner, grumbling to herself, and making it uncomfortable for Joe whenever he came in.

"Sure, it wor a wild scheme for the skipper to take me along wid him on this cruise," she muttered, "whin no wan knows how long it may last. What's the use av a stewardess on boord whin there are no ladies? Troth! it's all well enough at home in the cottage he do call his ship, but this is the real thing, and I don't like it, and av the walkin' wasn't so bad I'd turn about now and go home, so I would."

After leaving the bay and the town, the Sprite kept on down the coast, which tended to the south and east, there being another and larger town about ten miles to the south, whither boating parties often went, as there was a large hotel near the shore where many fashionable people stayed during the summer, and this was, of course, an attraction for the people of the smaller towns.

The Sprite had arrived nearly abreast of the hotel, keeping well out from shore, however, when Mr. Wattles, who was on deck, hurried into the cabin and said:

"There's a squall coming up, sir, and a nasty one at that. Will you keep on or make a harbor?"

"Keep on, of course," growled Ben Bluff, waving the stump of his left arm at the mate. "The Sprite can stand any sort o' breeze that blows around these parts."

The mate went on deck with a grunt of disapproval, and as he started forward a cry from one of the men attracted his attention.

"Begorry, that feller'll go over as sure as guns."

"What's that?" asked the mate.

"That feller out there in the sailboat, sir," answered Jim. "Faix, be the lucks av him he's clean lost his head, and if he's not careful he'll be upset in a minute."

Even as the man spoke the wind freshened visibly, white caps began to appear out at sea, and in the east a small cloud now arose which increased in size every instant.

A squall was certainly coming up, but Ben Bluff had said he would keep on, and there was no use trying to prevent him now.

The attention of all hands was now called to the man in the sailboat, now not far distant.

He seemed to have lost control of his craft or else to be ignorant of the proper way to handle her, for instead of drawing nearer to shore, he was constantly getting further away, the boat not being such as to stand much of a blow.

Suddenly there was a cry from Jack Port, and the boat was seen to go over, the sail resting on the water.

"Run down and pick her up, Mr. Wattles," cried the young fellow. "I'm afraid there are ladies on board."

The storm was rapidly approaching, and it was necessary to do something at once.

Without consulting the skipper the mate ran at once for the capsized boat, now fully three miles from shore, Jack and Dick standing well up forward ready to throw the line.

As they came nearer they could see three figures upon the half exposed bottom of the boat, the sail both preventing her from overturning completely and from righting herself.

Two of the party were ladies, the third being a young man of about twenty-five.

"Luff a bit!" cried Jack. "Up a little more. Let her shake; that's it. Ahoy there! Can you catch a line?"

The ladies were clinging desperately to the gunwale of the boat, and seemed unwilling to release their hold, the man calling out:

"You'll have to send us a boat or else run alongside. The ladies dare not let go."

"That's Bob Clifford," said Dick, under his breath. "He's a fine sailor, he is."

"Stand by to make a line fast!" cried Jack, seizing one end of a coil of rope and securing it around his body as the Sprite hovered within a fathom or two of the sailboat.

It was an anxious moment, for the sky grew steadily blacker,

the waves rose higher, and in a few minutes nothing could be done.

"All fast?" cried Jack.

"Aye, aye!"

In an instant the brave young fellow had leaped overboard, and was swimming toward the boat.

At the same moment a line thrown by Dick was seized by Clifford, who immediately made it fast around his waist, and then dropped into the water.

A few steady strokes brought Jack to the capsized boat, and in an instant he had clambered up the side.

"Haul away!" he shouted. "Now, young ladies, keep as cool as possible; don't shriek, and don't throw your arms about me, or we will all go down."

In another moment the bowsprit of the Sprite was right over their heads.

Dick was already out upon the guys. Brophy was at the knighthead and Mr. Wattles was half over the port rail.

"Now, then, all together!"

Dick seized one of the young ladies, Brophy took the other, and Jack leaped into the forechains, and so on deck with the help of the mate, while in another moment the Sprite passed directly over the luckless boat and sent her to the bottom.

"Let her go off!" roared the skipper, who now appeared for the first time to take any interest in the matter. "Steady! Keep her at that. In with your topsail there. We're going to have something of a breeze, I reckon."

"Reckon we are," muttered the mate, "and I reckon, too, the skipper hasn't mended matters any by having his own way."

The sky was now as black as ink, the sea was one mass of foam, and the wind made all the ropes and shrouds fairly sing as it went howling through them.

Jack Port went aft, escorting the two young ladies, and was met at the cabin gangway by the skipper, who swung himself around on his good leg, so as to allow him to pass, but, besides a surly grunt and a frown, gave no other indication that he knew of their presence.

After Jack had gone below and turned over his charges to the care of Honora, the skipper roared at Dick:

"This here's a pretty mess! Now we'll have to go ashore and lose all this fine breeze. Where's the feller that upset the boat?"

"In the forecastle, sir," answered Dick.

"Well, let him stay there," growled Ben Bluff. "There ain't no room for such lubbers as him in the cabin."

Dick said nothing, but went below to get on an oilskin coat, the spray dashing over the deck in a manner to wet everything through in a short time.

He stopped in the main cabin long enough to see that the barometer had fallen greatly and was still falling, while, looking out at one of the ports, he saw that the sky grew blacker every instant.

"Not much chance of going ashore now, I think," he muttered, as he went to his own room, "nor all night, either, if signs count for anything."

Indeed, the little schooner was obliged to run for it, as any attempt to make the shore now would have been madness, the sky growing blacker, the sea rising higher, and the wind increasing in energy with each succeeding moment.

Night came on, and there appeared to be no abatement of the gale, which blew as though all the portals of the cave of the winds were opened at once and all the blasts that ever blew were let loose at once.

There was nothing to do but to keep well out to sea and clear of the coast and then run for it, and this was done. Ben Bluff growling to himself as he set the watches for the night:

"H'm! reckon old Billy Wattles was right for once, and I'd

better have stayed to hum another day, but 'twon't do to say so; no, sir!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN IRREPARABLE LOSS.

Nothing could be done that night toward returning the sailboat party to town, and the young ladies were made as comfortable as they could be, Honora taking them in charge and finding dry clothes for them.

The storm was as fierce as ever, and the Sprite was obliged to run before it, while Ben Bluff growled and grumbled at the weather, and proceeded to make himself as uncomfortable as possible.

"We're bound to have a reg'lar old hurricane of it," he said to the mate. "I never knowed it to fail when you pick up folks at sea. I reckon old Davy Jones is mad 'cause of bein' cheated out'n his reg'lar victims, and is bound ter make it nasty for the fellers as cheats him."

"Wall, it do look a bit blusterin', sir," asserted Mr. Wattles; "but like enough it'll blow itself out afore mornin', and we'll have it fine arter that."

The skipper would not accept this view of the matter, however, and giving himself a turn with his good leg, he returned:

"No, sir; there ain't such luck. This 'ere wind is sure to blow us clear away from where we want to go. We're bound for the West Ingies, ain't we? Well, we'll fetch up in the Canaries or the Cape o' Good Hope, as sure as you're born; you see if we don't."

The young ladies were given the state-room occupied by Jack and Dick, who took a smaller room, one of them bunking with the mate, as both would not be asleep at the same time, an arrangement which suited all hands except the skipper.

His new guests appeared at dinner that evening, and really graced the table by their faces and neat appearance, but the old sea dog was in a bad humor, and scarcely uttered a word during the meal.

When it was over, he took himself off to his own room, lighted his pipe and smoked in solemn silence and in solitude, re-appearing in an hour in oilskins and sou'wester and taking his watch on deck. Far from blowing itself out before morning, as Mr. Wattles had predicted, the storm increased in violence, and the Sprite, under double reefs and topsails furled, swept on before it.

It was useless to attempt to put about and sail against such a wind and in such a sea, and the young ladies were soon convinced that their stay upon the Sprite was to be longer than they had apprehended.

Jack Port was secretly glad of it, for it gave him an opportunity to be with Kitty Waters, whose avowed admirer he was, although the presence of Clifford greatly interfered with his enjoyment.

Ben Bluff remained on deck until midnight, when Mr. Wattles took his place, with the two young fellows as his crew, Brophy and Snitz having turned in.

At four o'clock the skipper turned out again, Dick Port remaining on watch, being joined by Clifford, much to the young fellow's surprise.

"You aren't obliged to stand watch, you know," said Dick; "Joe can be called well enough."

"Oh, I don't mind," was the answer. "I'm not such a bad sailor. That squall took me unawares and then, having ladies with me rather made me nervous."

"That's a time a fellow ought to be cool, I should think," returned Dick. "However, if you want to stay, I've no objection, I'm sure."

"How long do you think this blow will last?" asked Clifford, presently.

"I'm sure I don't know. A week or so, perhaps."

"Where are you bound?"

"Down among the islands."

"You are provisioned for a long cruise, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," was the careless answer, for Dick did not like this fellow overmuch, and did not care to give him any more information than necessary.

"I suppose you will land the young ladies as soon as you can?"

"Yes; as soon as we can get back."

"Oh, you don't need to do that," said Clifford, quickly. "You can land us anywhere along the coast, and I can see them home."

Dick said nothing; but presently, taking a leather case from his pocket, Clifford said, carelessly:

"Do you smoke? I suppose it's not against the rules?"

"Cigars?" asked Dick.

"No; *cigarettes."

"I prefer a pipe myself, but I don't care to smoke now. Aye, aye, sir; I'll see to it," he suddenly added, starting forward, as if to carry out some order.

None had been given, but Clifford did not know this, and he waited for Dick to return, standing against the rail and looking out across the foaming waters.

"Confound his impudence," muttered Dick, seating himself on a bitt forward. "He will see the girls home, will he? Well, I guess not. Ha! if it wasn't for having him aboard, I wouldn't care if the gale did last a week, or even two."

Matters had not mended any by the morning, and the gale kept up all that day and all the following night, and on the morning of the second day there appeared to be no prospect of the weather becoming any more favorable for at least another day.

In fact, the gale lasted for fully forty-eight hours, during which the Sprite had been driven ahead at frantic speed, even with shortened sail, and now, even that the worst of it was over, there was no chance of turning back, as that would only be to face strong head winds, which would greatly delay their progress.

"Just our luck!" growled Ben Bluff. "It's all on account of the gals bein' on board, and I shouldn't be surprised if we was to have more on it, too."

On the morning of the third day the wind subsided to a considerable degree, and the sun appeared for an instant, not long enough for an observation to be taken, however.

During the forenoon it remained hidden, although its location could be told, but later in the day the sky grew so dark and the clouds so thick that, without a compass, no one could have told where it was.

There had been little time for social intercourse on board since the arrival of the young ladies, the weather being so bad and owing to the utter impossibility of going on deck, and to the discomfort of the cabins, but now there was some little respite, and Jack Port began to make himself agreeable to Kitty Waters, and to try to make her more comfortable.

Dick would have devoted himself to Ida, the younger sister, but he happened to have a watch on deck at that time, and was too busy to carry on more than a few moments' conversation at a time, when the young girl passed him in her walk up and down the deck.

When the dog watches were set, however, even this had to be abandoned, for the wind suddenly veered and they had a regular hurricane, and were forced to run before it with nothing up but a shortened foresail and one jib.

This state of things lasted during the entire night and well into the next day, without any visible change.

During the afternoon Jim Brophy was at the wheel, Ben Bluff

on deck, and the two young fellows in the waist, looking anxiously out across the heaving waste of waters.

"I don't like this sort of business at all," muttered Dick. "Do you see how those waves are chasing us up? The sea travels faster than we do."

"It's not very fine; that's a—— Ha! here we have it. Look out for yourself, Dick."

Both men sprang into the rigging as a huge wave broke over the poop and deluged the man at the wheel.

In a few moments a second wave followed, and then a third, making things very uncomfortable for the helmsman.

However, there seemed to be no chance of any more seas coming over astern, and for half an hour the little vessel dashed on, keeping ahead of the sea, and appearing to hold her own.

Suddenly, however, with scarcely an instant's warning, a second series of three great waves rushed up astern, the first flooding the cockpit, dashing across the quarter-deck and sweeping well forward.

The second wave followed before the effects of the first had passed off, and the result was most damaging.

An immense mass of water came over the stern, washing the helmsman from his post, and carrying him beyond the foremast, which he luckily missed striking.

Tons of water fell upon the binnacle, and in a moment it was torn from its fastenings and swept away.

An enormous mass of water was then hurled upon the skylight, which was smashed in and the cabin deluged.

The vessel was pooped, and unless something were done at once she would founder.

"Call all hands! Cut away the fore peak and throat hal-yards! Down she comes!"

Dick and Jack obeyed the order in a trice, while Mr. Wattles, hurrying upon deck, took charge of the wheel.

Down came the foresail on the run, the men quickly gathering in the wet canvas to prevent the wind from catching it.

"Cut away the gaskets of the mainsail! Hoist up your peak!"

In a few moments the peak was hoisted about ten feet, the wind caught it, the wheel was reversed, and around swung the little vessel, heading to the sea at the moment that the third great wave swept over her bows.

Enough sail to keep her steady was then hoisted, and she lay with her head to the wind.

"Mighty narrer chance that," muttered Ben Bluff. "Another one of them big uns would ha' sent us to the bottom. Now she's head on, Mr. Wattles?"

"Can't tell, sir. The binnacle was smashed, and that second wave broke in the skylight, carried away the tell-tale, and there isn't a compass on board."

It was speedily ascertained that that was not the whole extent of the damage, for the barometer and chronometer, which hung just under the skylight, had also been carried away by the force of the water falling upon them, and they were now useless.

The captain's instruments, which lay upon a table in the main cabin, were not to be found, and it was presumed that they had been washed into some corner by the water, which for a time had invaded nearly the entire vessel.

"What!" muttered Ben Bluff, when the loss was reported, "we haven't a single compass or anything else on board? Well, if we ain't lost, clean lost on the ocean!"

CHAPTER V.

AT THE STORM'S MERCY.

Night came on, and the Sprite lay to in a hurricane, the waves, one mass of foam, rushing along her sides, the sky as

black as ink, and nothing visible a few fathoms beyond the rail.

By morning the wind had blown itself out, and during the forenoon a calm succeeded, the sun appearing once more in all its glory.

There was no way of ascertaining their position, however, even with the sun shining, and they could only guess in what general direction the land lay from being able to see the sun.

How far they had traveled, or where they were at that moment, however, there was no possibility of ascertaining, and they were practically lost, as Ben Bluff had said.

The skipper came stumping up the cabin companion during the forenoon, brought himself to anchor on his wooden leg, squinted around the horizon, and muttered:

"Wull, I reckon we're sort o' evenin' things up now. Fust we go like the very mischief, and then we don't go at all. Is the glass risin', Mr. Wattles?"

"No, sir; I reckon not," answered the mate; "that last fall it got knocked all the risin' out of it, like slammin' a lump o' dough agin the wall. Reckon we have to go by sight nowadays, skipper."

"Wall, git a telescope and see if there's any chance of any wind in any quarter whatsoever, Mr. Wattles."

"The spy-glasses are just like blind men, sir; they ain't no sight in 'em. Lookin' through a stove pipe is just as good as squintin' through them nowadays."

"Wull, can't you take the sun and see where we are, Mr. Wattles?"

"Reckon we're here, sir; and that's about all, and as for takin' the sun, there it is, and there she'll stick for all of us."

"What's come to my sextant, Mr. Wattles? Here, you, Joe," to the black cook who was crossing the deck, "go and fetch up my sextant."

"Dere am no sexton abo'd dis packet, sah," said Joe. "Sextons ain't de kind o' passengers I like ter see nowhar."

"I said sextant, you lubber," roared the captain, swinging off on his wooden leg and taking a stride with his good one. "My instrument, you blockhead."

"Does yo' mean dat face covered ting wha' yo' shoots at de sun wif, cap'n?" asked Joe, dodging the angry skipper.

"Yes, you black son of a pudding bag; of course."

"Wull, sah, it am down in de cabin, but it am so twisted an' broken dat yo' tink yo' am cross-eyed when yo' look froo it. All dem tings hangs in de same place, or sat on de table when de watah come in, and dey am wuff nuffin' now 'cept fo' ol' brass an' iron."

The skipper tacked to port, went about and headed toward the cabin, remarking to the mate, as he had his hand on the companion railing:

"Wall, Mr. Wattles, when you think it's eight bells, you can call the watch, and we'll have dinner."

"Why, there's my watch!" cried Dick. "I forgot all about it. I'll tell you what time it is in a jiffy."

The young fellow hurried below, and the captain sat down on a tool chest alongside the cabin door, and filled his pipe.

Presently Dick returned, and the skipper, who had scratched a match on his wooden leg, and was now lighting his pipe, looked inquiringly at him.

"It's now just"—and Dick stopped and put his watch to his ear—"just ten minutes past"—another pause to give the watch a shake—"ten minutes past—oh, bother, the thing has stopped!" Ben Bluff jumped upon his good leg and thrust out the wooden one so suddenly that Joe, who was just coming up out of the cabin, ran against it, tripped, and fell on the deck.

"What's the use of having a watch if it don't go?" snapped the skipper.

"Well, I suppose it will go if I wind it up," answered Dick.

The skipper gave a grunt and went below without a word, while Dick wound his watch in silence, set it by guess, dropped

it in his pocket and walked forward to where Ida Waters was leaning on the rail and looking idly out upon the ocean.

Jack Port had now plenty of time to devote to Kitty, and he was constantly at her side, to the very evident disgust of Clifford, who had come out with his mustache newly curled and in a suit of white duck which he had borrowed from Joe until his own clothes could be washed and pressed.

There was a multitude just now, for Jack and Kitty were seated on the heel of the bowsprit, engaged in an animated conversation, and evidently not desiring that it should become general.

"The young upstart!" muttered Clifford. "I suppose he thinks that he saved her life, and that she owes him an everlasting debt of gratitude. I'd like to wring his neck for his impudence!"

Seeing that he was not wanted by either Jack or Dick, he joined the mate, who was strolling to and fro aft, and smoked and chatted with him for an hour, inwardly chaffing at being forced to fall back upon such company.

Jim Brophy, the bow-legged Irishman, who had been considerably bruised by his rapid transit across the hurricane deck on the previous night, came limping aft from the forecabin, while the mate and Clifford were talking, and said:

"Excuse me, sor; but it's eight bells, and time for dinner."

"How d'ye know that, Brophy?" asked Mr. Wattles.

"Well, sor, me stomach tells me so in the first place," answered the Irishman, "and the sun is right overhead in the next, and finally I see Honora luckin' out the pantry windy, and she do niver do that, sor, till it's time for grub."

"Sound eight bells, Brophy," said the mate. "There ain't no goin' agin such evidence as that."

The sound of the bell broke up the little interviews between the captain's nephews and the young lady passengers, and soon afterward Joe, with all the dignity of a butler in high life, announced that dinner was served.

The calm lasted till nearly daybreak of the following day, when another hurricane struck the vessel, and she scudded before it like a bird.

The gale lasted for several hours, and then suddenly died out, being succeeded by a dead calm of about ten minutes' duration, when a cyclone burst forth with the suddenness of a thunder clap.

Ben Bluff had taken the precaution to put the Sprite upon the opposite tack before the second burst of the storm, and this saved the vessel, as otherwise she would have been swamped.

She lay to with her head to the wind, while the fierce gusts swept over her and the foaming waves dashed along her sides, now breaking in spray over her bow, and then lifting her high in air as though they meant to hurl her into the very depths.

Although it was now day, the sky grew so black that it was impossible to see across the deck, an almost inconceivable darkness settling over the ocean, while in the midst of it all a thousand terrifying sounds could be heard, torturing the imagination with the thought of nameless dangers against which there could be no possible safeguard.

For hours this state of things continued, and the suspense was maddening.

Lost on the ocean, at the mercy of wind, knowing neither their position nor destination, fearing everything and knowing nothing, it would have been small wonder if the luckless company of the Sprite had lost their wits in such a crisis.

Despite the fact that they were headed to the wind, the skipper knew that they were drifting with some powerful current, but what it was, or whither it was taking them, he had not the least means of knowing.

The sun was blotted out; day was like night; all account of time was lost, and all they were certain of was that they were being swept furiously onward, possibly to be washed upon some

unknown coast at any instant, or to be overwhelmed by some giant wave, and then to be no more.

There was not a man that did not remain on deck during all this time, and no one thought of rest or food while the suspense lasted.

At last, although it was pitch dark, Ben Bluff, who was lashed to the mainmast, said:

"The wind is coming from aft. We ain't drifting; we are scudding. Can't you see nothing, Mr. Wattles?"

"No, sir, I can't see you, even, but——"

"Breakers ahead!" suddenly screamed Dick Port, in a voice heard above the roar of the storm.

"Then the Lord have mercy on us!" gasped the skipper; "for we are lost!"

Louder grew the roar of the breakers, and then, as though seized by some giant hand, the vessel was lifted up high in the air and thrown violently forward, creaking and groaning in every part.

Then there was a shock, accompanied by a grating sound, a sudden uplifting as a huge wave struck her on the quarter, a dash forward, another shock which threw every one down, and then the vessel suddenly stopped and remained motionless.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCERTAINTY.

"What has happened? Where are we?" asked Kitty Waters, coming up out of the cabin. "Are we at anchor?"

"Yes'm, we are," answered the gruff voice of the captain, "and anchored so tight that we'll never get loose again. I reckon we've struck on a coral beach, and when once them rocks gets hold of a ship's bottom, she's in a vise, and there's no getting her out of it."

"Then we have reached land, and are safe?"

"Well, we've reached land, such as it is, young lady, but whether we're safe or not is more'n I can say. Hello, there, fetch a lantern, somebody, and hang it over the bow, so's we can see where we are."

It was pitchy dark on all sides, though now and again a phosphorescent gleam could be seen as a wave rushed past the vessel, no other light being visible.

The sky was black, but presently a distant flash of lightning could be seen, not brilliant enough to show them their position, however, and only adding to the terror of the hour, as it predicted a storm more or less near.

The vessel was now as immovable as the rock itself, and being on an even keel, there was no trouble in walking the deck, which was as level as the sea in a calm.

Brophy and Snitz brought lanterns, and the skipper took one of them in his hand and walked forward, calling to the men to follow.

"Lay out there on the boom and lower that light a bit, Jim. We may be able to see suthin'," he grunted, as he paused at the bow.

Brophy scrambled out upon the jibboom, lowered himself by means of the dolphin strikes, and kneeling upon a stay, flashed the light below him.

"There's wather below us, sor," he called out, "but I don't think it can be very deep, and when the tide goes out there'll be none at all."

"Never mind what's below, Jim," growled the skipper. "Tell us what's ahead. Is it rocks or land?"

"It's that dark I can't see, sor," said the man. "But the wather do stop somewhere when it goes by, for I can hear it shrike, and it wouldn't do that, sor, if there were open say beyant."

"Shin out to the end of the flying jibboom and show your light, Jim, and, Jacob, hand him this here one. Maybe two lights will be better than one."

Brophy took the extra lantern, the ring of which he held in his teeth, and made his way to the end of the flying jibboom, where he stood upright, holding on by the foretopmast stay and peering into the darkness.

"What do you see, Jim?" called out Ben Bluff.

"Nothing at all, sor," answered Brophy, waving the two lanterns back and forth.

"Is it land or just reefs?"

"I'll never tell ye in this light, sor. It's as dark as the mouth of—"

There came a sudden flash of lightning, which fairly blinded the man, and in the start that he gave he let one of the lanterns fall.

The light could be seen on the water for a moment, and then it went out without revealing anything.

A terrific crash of thunder followed the lightning, and Brophy scrambled in upon the deck as rapidly as possible, for his position out there upon the boom with so much metal about him was not a safe one in a thunder storm.

The flash had come upon them all so suddenly that, notwithstanding its vividness, no one had been able to see what lay beyond, but all had involuntarily closed their eyes or turned away, and the opportunity was lost.

"Did you see anything, Jim?" asked Ben Bluff, when Brophy reached the deck.

"No, sir; it came so suddenly that I was blinded and saw nothing."

"Watch when the next flash comes. The storm is getting nearer, I take it."

There was no other flash for several minutes, however, and when it came no one was prepared for it, and the light only blinded them without enabling them to see what lay beyond the ship's head.

The clap of thunder which followed close upon the lightning, being almost simultaneous with it, in fact, was so loud that it fairly shook the vessel, and put all hands into such an alarm that there was no thought for anything else.

A few minutes passed, and then a rain storm suddenly broke upon the vessel and the crew was forced to seek shelter from the pelting floods which descended upon them.

The rain came down in solid masses, and in a few seconds the scuppers were choked, and the deck was fairly afloat with the accumulated water which could not run off fast enough.

For fully five minutes it came down with the greatest violence and without cessation, and those who ventured forth without oilskin jackets or trousers were wet to the skin in an instant.

After the first violent downpour, the rain fell steadily, but with less force, although it continued for fully an hour.

The natural effect of this rain was to take down the sea, and it was speedily noticed that the waves were not so high as before, although being fixed solidly upon the coral rocks, the vessel was not affected by the waves, small or large.

At the end of an hour and thirty minutes the rain fell with more gentleness, and finally ceased altogether, although the sky still remained overcast, and it was impossible to ascertain their position.

They might have struck upon an isolated reef, far, far from land; they may have run upon some desolate island, or they might be upon the mainland, but none of these theories could be determined upon as the correct one until morning.

Then the vessel might go to pieces and leave them at the mercy of the waves in an instant, or cast upon some barren rock where starvation awaited them, and whichever way they looked at the situation, it presented only the most discouraging possibilities.

At last, when the rain had long ceased and the heavens began to show faint signs of clearing, the skipper said:

"Wall, we're here, anyhow, and safe enough for the present, and I reckon all hands had better turn in, leaving an anchor watch on deck. Mr. Wattles, you can call me at sunrise. I think I'll take a few hours' sleep."

"How can he sleep when all is so uncertain?" whispered Kitty Waters to Jack Port.

"There is no uncertainty about it if Uncle Ben turns in, but he doesn't care to tell everybody what he knows, I presume," answered the young fellow. "The skipper would not leave the deck if he did not think we were perfectly safe."

Thus assured, the young ladies went below, and were followed by all except Dick Port, who remained on watch.

He was joined in about ten minutes by Clifford, who came from the cabin smoking a cigarette.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"No, thanks; I am on duty."

"Where are we? Have you any idea?"

"No."

"Is that land over there, think?"

"Where you are pointing? I should say not; or at least not for a thousand miles or so."

"Oh, well, you know what I mean. Do you think we are on land or only on a lonely rock?"

Dick made no reply, and Clifford, after puffing impatiently for two or three minutes, said brusquely:

"You don't like me, Port, and you are bound not to treat me decent."

"It isn't a question of like or dislike, whatever," answered Dick, carelessly. "It's simply indifference, and as for my way of treating you, if you don't like it—well, there's a remedy at hand."

"You mean that I can clear out, I suppose?" snarled Clifford, savagely biting his cigarette in two.

"Well, I'm on duty and you're not," said Dick, quietly, "that's all."

"You may be sorry some day that you have made an enemy of me," hissed Clifford, walking aft.

"I didn't know I had," said Dick, "and I don't care much. I can't see how it affects me any in either case."

An hour later a thin, gray line appeared on the horizon, a gentle breeze was felt, and the approach of a new day was heralded by the singing of birds.

"Birds!" muttered Dick, walking forward; "then we must be near some habitable land, and not on a mere isolated reef."

The light in the east grew stronger, and soon, beyond the vessel, and distant only a few fathoms, appeared a grove of trees, promising both rest and repose to the castaways, while beyond, and rising above the land, was a lofty mountain, whose top was lost in the clouds.

The Sprite had grounded upon the coral beach of some far-away land, where, no one knew, but they were safe at all events, and in this alone there was great cause for rejoicing.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SKIPPER ISSUES HIS ORDERS.

"All hands on deck! Ahoy there!" shouted Dick, in ringing tones, the cry echoing through the cabin and arousing the sleepers.

The mate was the first to appear, and as he came stumbling up on deck, he asked hurriedly

"What's the matter, boy? What's up?"

"Well, the sun is up for one thing, or will be shortly, and the matter is that—well, look yonder and you can see for yourself."

"Land!" gasped the mate. "No reefs, nor nothing, but good, solid land, with trees and water and food and shelter and—hooray, boy! that's the best sight I've seen for many a day, and I ain't mad for being waked up so sudden. Go below and call the skipper. I wouldn't let any one but you have the fun of it, though, indeed I wouldn't."

"What's the matter here?" growled the voice of Ben Bluff, and a moment later his shaggy head, surmounted by a tarpaulin hat, was seen coming up the companion.

In a few moments he reached the deck, struck off on the starboard tack, looked toward the shore, and said:

"Ahoy, there, Mr. Wattles!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Do you know what place this is?"

"Not me, cap'n."

"What is it, island or main?"

"Couldn't tell, cap'n. I only just raised it myself, and I haven't had no time to explore it."

"Suppose we sail around it, Mr. Wattles, and see."

"Aye, aye, sir; but I reckon you'll have to get the schooner off of them coral rocks fust. They're holding her like a vise, and I reckon if her timbers are not busted that she'll have to stay till the day when Davy Jones sets free the many poor sailormen that he's got in his locker below there."

"Awast, you lubber," growled Ben Bluff, standing on his good left leg and swinging his wooden right around so as to catch the mate on the shins. "I didn't intend to go around in the schooner, of course. Ain't we got boats, Mr. Wattles?"

"We've got our boat, skipper, and it ain't any too good for wear, but I reckon we might take it around the island, if this here is an island."

"That's the wust of it," growled the skipper, swinging around so as to reach the cabin door on one tack. "We don't know where we are, and we ain't got no way of findin' out. Where do you reckon we be, Mr. Wattles?"

"Stuck on shore somewhere, I reckon, skipper," said the mate, dryly.

"H'm! Any fool can see that," retorted Ben Bluff, as he made a bee line for the cabin and reached the companion by one tack, when he stumped his way down and disappeared.

The two girls now came on deck, and as they saw the land, uttered exclamations of surprise and delight.

"Land!" cried Kitty. "Oh, I'm so glad. Where are we, Mr. Port?"

"That is more than I know," replied Dick; "though I can safely say that we are somewhere in the tropics. Trees like those yonder don't grow north, except in conservatories."

"Have you seen any of the inhabitants?" asked Ida. "They must be savages."

"I would not be surprised," said Dick; "but I have seen none."

Just then Jack came on deck, followed by Clifford, the latter glancing at the shore and muttering to himself:

"What place is this? It must be a long way from home. Looks like an island. At any rate we're stranded here, and not likely to get away soon. It will be strange if I don't win Kitty yet, in spite of that impudent young sailor."

Then he joined the others and attempted to make himself agreeable, particularly to the girls, whom he still seemed to regard as under his protection.

All hands were on deck by this time, Honora, black Joe, the two sailors and all, and there was not one who did not have something to say about the land they had run upon, and no one would have had any breakfast if Mr. Wattles had not suddenly called out:

"Ahoy, there, cook, are you going to give us any grub to-day?"

"Yessir, dreckly, sah," said Joe, promptly. "Does yo' wan' it in de cabin or on sho'?"

"In the cabin, of course," said the mate. "No one goes on shore without leave, you lubber. Don't you know that?"

"Yas'r, all right, sah!" said Joe, and disappeared in the galley.

Although the Sprite had run well upon shore there was a foot or so of water where she lay, and this extended to a few yards beyond the end of the jibboom, the tide being high at this time.

The vessel was perfectly motionless, and the longer she remained upon the bed of coral the more firmly would she be held, so that unless the tide rose high enough to float her, the chances of her ever leaving her present position were small indeed.

After breakfast Ben Bluff came upon deck, stumped forward, looked over the bow, thought deeply for a few minutes, and then muttered:

"H'm! It's been high as it'll get to-day, and the highest won't do us much good, I reckon, even if we was lighter. I calc'late this is my last v'y'ge."

Then he stumped aft, wiped his forehead with a red handkerchief, and called out:

"Call all hands, Mr. Wattles, and stand 'em in a line along the starboard rail."

"All hands!" cried the mate, and the bow-legged Irishman, the knock-kneed German, and black Joe obeyed the call.

"That ain't all," roared the skipper. "I want all hands, I say."

"I say, that means us," laughed Dick Port, who was standing by the port-rail, forward, talking with the two girls. Come on; you're counted in as well as the rest of us."

"But we are not sailors," said Ida, with a pretty pout.

"You go in with all hands, though," said Dick; "so come on," and taking the girls' hands, he hurried over to the starboard and took his place on the end of the line.

Jack Port now came up from the cabin and joined the line, along which Ben Bluff swept his eye.

Clifford was seated forward, smoking a cigarette, evidently not aware that he was included in the muster.

"Mr. Wattles," said Ben Bluff with a frown, "will you bring that 'ere feller for'ard up here at once? I said all hands, and I meant all hands."

Clifford, hearing the command, came forward, still smoking, looked carelessly at the line, took a place next to Kitty Waters, and said:

"Didn't know you wanted me, captain. I'm only a passenger, you know."

"You're one of the crew, that's what you are," retorted Ben Bluff, standing on his left leg, "and when you're called you want to come. Now, then, attention."

The skipper glanced along the line, and then said, severely:

"Mr. Wattles, I said all hands."

"Aye, aye, sir," grunted the mate.

"Where's that red-headed Irishwoman, then? She's somebody, ain't she?"

"She thinks she is," chuckled Dick, softly.

"Yes, sir; of course."

"Then bring her up."

"Ahoy, there!" roared the mate at the cabin door. "Come on deck, below there!"

"Indeed an' I won't!" retorted Honora, from the pantry. "It's busy I am."

"Come up!" called Mr. Wattles.

"Ah, go about your business, ye ould say porcupine," returned the mutinous woman. "There's no storrum and no pirates, nor rivenue officers, the vessel is in no danger, and I'm not comin'."

"She says she won't come up, cap'n," reported the mate, although Ben Bluff had heard Honora's answer as well as he had.

"Then send and bring her up!" stormed the skipper, "if it

takes all hands. Who's skipper o' this here craft, if I ain't? Here, Brophy, you and the Dutchman go down and fetch her up, and if you want help, get the cook."

"Ya; I bate you I bring dot Irishvomens up once," said Snitz. "Valk dis vay, Irish."

"He can't walk that way," laughed Dick. "He couldn't get his knees together like that to save his neck. He looks as if a tunnel ran under him and he was always sitting on it."

"Come on up eout of that, Honora," cried Brophy, descending the steps. "The captain wants yez."

"Let him fetch me, thin!" cried the Amazon stewardess, brandishing a rolling pin.

"Come out once und don't hab some more foolish business," said Yacob. "Who was you, anyway?"

"I'm Honora Branagan, that's who I am, and I'll not lave me pantry whin I'm makin' a foine mate poy, not for nobody, so go an eout av me sight or I'll brain yez."

Joe, the cook, was called, but the three could not have taken the contrary-minded woman on deck, had not young Dick come below and called out suddenly:

"Hi—hi, Norah, come on deck. We've discovered Ireland. I know it by the green."

The big stewardess rushed up the companion instantly, and, once on deck, it was easy enough to put her on the line.

"H'm!" said Ben Bluff, when the whole ship's company was now assembled, "what I want ter say is this. Here we are, stuck fast on the rocks and no chance o' gettin' off, but this here land, whatever it is, is under my orders just as much as the wessel was, and I'm cap'n, and all hands is bound to do just as I says, and if he don't he gets put in irons. Crew's dismissed. Mr. Wattles, set the watches. Port watch has the deck."

"Sure, if that war all ye had to say, yez might have called it down to me troo the skylight," said Honora, with a snort and toss of her head. "That much for yer orders," and with a snap of her fingers the impulsive creature went below, while the sailors resumed their various occupations, regarding the whole affair as perfectly regular and shipshape.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXPLORERS MAKE SEVERAL DISCOVERIES.

The work of exploring the land where the vessel had stranded was at once began, Mr. Wattles going ashore with Dick and Jack Port, the skipper superintending the work to be done on board the Sprite.

The shore party struck inland, heading for the hill, and after an hour's tramp, reached the highest elevation, from which a view could be had in all directions.

"We are on an island," said Dick, "and a solitary one at that. I can't see the least bit of land in any direction."

"There's land over there to the nor'ward, for all ye can't see it," muttered the mate. "But nobody knows whether it's another island or not."

"How do you know there is?" asked Dick. "You can't see the least bit of land to the north."

"No, sir; but I can see land clouds, and them's different from sea clouds, and I know the land is there, maybe fifty, maybe a hundred miles."

"It's settled that we are on an island, at any rate," added Dick; "and that we are the only inhabitants. I haven't seen the first sign of a native."

"That's too bad," said Clifford, "for they might be able to tell us where we are."

"It's a chance if they'd know theirselves, the natives of these lone islands being mostly savages," returned the mate, "and we're better off without 'em. Suppose we strike down the hill

to t'other side, and then make our way around. They appears to be a good beach over yonder to the west'ard."

The mate took the lead, Dick and Clifford following, and Jack bringing up the rear, the path being steep but not dangerous.

At the end of ten minutes they halted on a level platform to take breath, the path below them being strewn with great bowlders, among which they would be forced to pick their way.

"The other side was easier than this," muttered Dick, as he and the mate resumed the march.

"I can't go down there without something to help me," muttered Dick, and taking his knife he cut and trimmed a stout stick to assist him in making his way down the path.

The delay caused him to fall back so that he was now in the rear instead of Jack Port.

Suddenly, as they were right among the bowlders, the arching branches overhead shutting out the view of the path above them, a wild shout was heard, followed by a rushing, crashing sound.

Clifford was seen hurrying down toward them, his hat off, his face pale with excitement; then he suddenly fell and rolled over a low bank at the side of the path, while down the slope crashed a giant boulder, rushing straight toward the explorers.

Jack was in the greatest danger, for the mate was below and off to one side of the course of the rock, while Dick had time to spring out of the way.

For an instant Jack grew as pale and faint as death, his breath and strength seemed to leave him, and he stood directly in the path of the descending boulder without the power to help himself.

For an instant only, however, for the rock suddenly struck a sapling in its course, snapped it asunder and plunged forward.

The interruption, slight as it was, saved Jack's life.

It gave him a chance to recover himself, and, seizing an overhanging branch, he swung himself across the path and out of danger, while the mass of rock, swerving from its former course, passed considerably to one side of both Dick and the mate, and went crashing down the hillside until its speed was suddenly checked by striking against another mass larger than itself.

"Are you all right, Jack?" cried Dick, after the boulder had plunged on.

"Yes," shouted Jack, swinging to the ground. "But it was a close shave."

"Next time you won't be so lucky," hissed Clifford, as he arose and limped down the path, leaning on his stick.

"I hope no one is hurt," he said, as he joined the others. "I carelessly dislodged that boulder with my stick, never dreaming that I could move it, and narrowly escaped being crushed myself."

That much of the man's story was true, for he had escaped as by a miracle, but he had deliberately dislodged the boulder which he saw was kept from falling by a mere sliver of rock, with the direct intention of ridding himself of Jack Port.

The act was not premeditated; the temptation swept across him in a moment, but it was as deliberate as though planned and thought out for days.

"Some of them rocks is just balanced on edge, and the least tilt sends 'em rollin', and nothin' can stop 'em," observed the mate. "Ye want to be mighty keerful unless ye know fur sure that the thing is solid, and this here'll be a warnin' to all you young fellers."

"It certainly will be to me," said Clifford. "I don't know that I ever had a closer shave myself, and the rest of you ran as great or a greater risk."

"Well, it's all right now," muttered Jack, never suspecting

the attempt upon his life; "and we'll be all the more careful after this."

"I will, at any rate," thought Clifford. "He suspects nothing as yet; but we will see if I do not win the girl I love before we are clear of this island."

The level was reached without further accident, and passing through a small piece of woodland, the party came out upon a grassy plain sloping gently down to the sea.

"This here is better than t'other side," said the mate. "'Cause there's a good, handy beach right here, and none o' yer sharp coral rocks to grind a boat's bottom to pieces. This here is the place we'd orter have beached on."

"We did not have any choice," laughed Dick. "What will you do now, Mr. Wattles?"

"Go around to the nor'ward till we come to the wessel. It can't be more'n an hour or two's walk."

"All right; but we ought to have something to eat first. There's a grove of banana trees over there. Suppose we help ourselves."

The grove was not more than six or eight rods distant, and Dick ran ahead and had climbed the nearest tree by the time the others came up.

"Oh, I say," he called out, half a banana in one hand, and his sheath knife in the other, "this is a fine way of living, this is—nothing to do but cut your breakfast off a tree, no cooking, no washing dishes or anything of that sort, but only—Hallo! I didn't see that before!"

"Didn't see what?" asked Jack. "What is it?"

"Why, over there, on the other side of this grove. You'd never believe what it is."

"A ship!" cried Jack.

"No."

"What is it, you young monkey, then?" cried the mate. "How dare you keep us in suspension like this? What do you see, anyhow?"

"A house; or, at any rate, a part of one."

"A house!" cried Clifford. "Then the island is inhabited."

"Can't tell," muttered Dick; "but the house is there sure enough. There it is, right on the other side of the banana grove, straight over in that direction," and Dick pointed in an easterly direction.

The mate skirted the grove for a short distance, and suddenly exclaimed:

"Great guns! the boy must be right, for here's a reg'lar path, hard and solid. Some grass on it, to be sure, but a plain path for all that."

Leading the way along the path, followed by Jack Port and Clifford, the mate, after a walk of an eighth of a mile, came upon a small stone house standing in what had once been a clearing, but which was now so thickly overgrown with tangled vines and shrubs as to be well-nigh impassable.

The roof of the house, or rather a tower built at one side of it, stood above the trees, and it was this that Dick had seen from his perch in the banana tree.

"Well," muttered the mate, slashing at the vines and undergrowth with his knife, "somebody lived here once, I reckon, but it can't have been very lately. Suppose we take a look at the place?"

The house was only a story in height, and had a frontage of about thirty feet, there being three or four doorways and as many windows, the place having evidently been used as a general abode for several people.

The center doorway was the one most easily approached, but the mate, on reaching it, was obliged to cut away a vine which half concealed it.

A door of oak was revealed, and the mate threw his shoulder against it and sent it crashing inward, falling from its rusty hinges to the floor.

There was a cloud of dust from within, and then there came

a shriek, so wild and unearthly that with one accord the three explorers rushed from the spot in terror, and did not pause until they were once more upon open ground.

CHAPTER IX.

BEN BLUFF'S ADVENTURE.

After the departure of the mate's party, Brophy brought the boat back, and the skipper was lowered over the side and taken ashore, his wooden leg preventing him from jumping in as lightly as Dick or Jack would have done.

The negro cook and Yacob let themselves over the side on a rope, and dropped into the water, when they easily waded ashore.

Brophy first rowed all around the vessel, there being water enough to float the small boat, and then, having inspected the position of the Sprite, Ben Bluff went on land, being obliged to wade a few yards through the surf.

"It's plain to be seen that we can't get off them rocks without lightenin' her a good bit," mused the skipper, standing on a ledge of rock beyond reach of the water and surveying the vessel critically. "You didn't notice anything that looked like holes, did you, Jim?"

"No, sir," said the Irishman. "I have not been down in the hold yet, sor. That's the place to look."

"The fust thing to see about is whether she can be got off," muttered Ben Bluff, "and then we'll examine into the p'int whether she'll be any good when she are up, you lubber."

"Yis, sor," said Brophy. "Ye have it right ivery time."

"You and the Dutchman go and see what size of timber grows hereabouts," muttered the skipper, "and me and Joe'll go and look for water. You'd better lift the boat across them sharp rocks. I don't want the planks sawed in two."

Then the captain stumped along shore with Joe, keeping his eyes on the various prominent points of the island as he walked on, as though trying to fix them in his mind.

"I don't remember to've seen this here particular place before," he muttered. "Do you, Joe? 'Course you don't; you never traveled none, 'cept 'long the coast a bit. By the looks o' things, we ought to be in the West Ingies, somewhares, though the Bermudas looks just the same, for that matter. It'd be kind o' funny to find we'd run on the coast of Florida somewhere, wouldn't it? Wall, I don't see how we can be any further'n that. Hallo, what's this? Stream o' water, hey? Taste it, Joe, and see if it's salt."

"No, sah, it am fresh," said Joe, stooping down and taking up some of the water from the little stream that crossed their path and ran into the ocean.

"Fresh, is it?"

"Yas'r, fresh."

"H'm!" said the skipper, suddenly going off on a fresh tack, which took him alongside the stream.

He followed it up till he entered a wood, and presently came upon a ledge of rock, down which the water fell with gentle murmur, catching the sunlight in its descent and shimmering like gold in the warm glow from above.

The skipper looked carefully about for several minutes, and then returned to the open, and kept on along shore, being obliged to strike farther in at the end of half an hour on account of the huge masses of rock which prevailed at this point, many of them extending into the sea.

"Seem to run along for quite a bit, don't they, Joe?" he asked; "and yonder's a p'int that stands up bold and high, and laughs at the breakers. Lucky thing we didn't run agin that last night when we come in, hey, Joe?"

"Reckon yo'n' me wouldn't be walkin' 'long yer if we had

'a' done it, cap'n," muttered Joe, as he ascended a gentle slope which took them away from the rocks.

They kept on until they reached the top of the point of rocks where there was a cliff nearly a hundred feet high, the waves forever boiling and seething at its base.

Here the skipper paused, and, leaning on Joe's shoulder, gazed long and earnestly over the strange land spread out before them.

"It ain't Cuba, Joe, nor yet it don't appear to be Florida," he murmured; "but furdernore'n dat I don't know what it is, but I reckon it's an island."

"Guess it is, cap'n," assented Joe, who never disputed the skipper. "Looks kinder like one, anyhow, as far as I c'n see, and—— Lawd o' mercy! What am dat?"

With a startled exclamation Joe suddenly sprang back, with never a thought of the skipper, who, losing his support thus abruptly, was thrown upon his back, his wooden leg in the air and his good one kicking out right and left in the most vigorous fashion.

"Avast there, you lubber!" he roared. "Come here and pick me up. What do you mean by reachin' away like that and lettin' a body fall? Come here, you black rascal, and pick me—— Hallo! What's that?"

His left foot had suddenly struck upon something which gave forth a ringing sound, and, contriving to bring himself to a sitting posture by means of his good limb, he gazed earnestly in front of him, where, in the midst of the rank grass that grew in the crevices of the rock, he saw a heavy iron ring nearly a foot in diameter, and against which his foot had struck.

"Wull, I never did!" he muttered, hitching himself nearer the strange object. "What's that ring bolt doin' up here on the cliff. This ain't no place to tie a boat to."

"Look out dar, cap'n!" cried Joe, coming up with a stone as large as his head in his hand. "Dere am snakes 'bout yer. Dat's what I seen when I gib dat yell. I seed one on 'em comin' out ob de rocks and—— Yah! dere he am now!"

The frightened cook suddenly dashed the stone upon the ground as the glittering serpent glided out from a rift in the rock not two feet from where the captain was sitting.

The stone frightened but did not kill the serpent, which quickly slipped away, while the huge negro suddenly seized the captain, lifted him to his feet, and started down the cliff with him at full speed.

Ben Bluff blustered and stormed, and commanded Joe to stop, but the cook never paused until he had reached the foot of the slope, where he sat down upon a boulder and began to fan himself with his straw hat.

"Consarn you! What did you want to make me run like that for, you black scorpion?" gasped the skipper. "I've a mind to split yer thick skull open wi' my stump. Haven't you got no manners to lug your commander off like that? If I'd two good legs, you lubber, you wouldn't ha' done it."

"Bress yo' haht, cap'n, yo' didn' wan' me to leabe yo' dere in a nes'ful o' snakes, did yo'?" cried Joe. "Dat place mus' ha' been stacked wi' 'em. I seed as much as two orful big ones m'se'f, reg'lar pison fellows dey was, too, an' yo' don' spec I was gwine fo' to leabe a unarmed man dere to be bitten to deff, does yo' cap'n? No, sah, I knows my duty by yo' better'n dat, sah."

"H'm! Well, you meant it all right, Joe," panted the skipper, "but I wasn't so one armed as you think, unarmed, I mean, you sculpin, for I could ha' killed the snakes easy enough, and more'n that, yer stopped me from makin' a discovery."

"Nuffin' to diskiver dere, cap'n, 'less 'twar mo' snakes," muttered Joe, "an' dey was 'nuff o' dem a'ready."

"I don't mean snakes," growled the skipper, aiming a blow at Joe with his stump. "There was a big iron ring set in the rock, and for all you know, there's a cave under the place

where treasure's buried, Cap'n Kidd's, or something like that, and now you've—— Hallo! What's that?"

The report of a gun was heard at that moment, and Ben Bluff started up and hurried toward the grove where he had discovered the rill, the sound having come from that direction.

Just before he reached the grove, Dick Port came out, followed a few moments later by the mate, Jack and Clifford.

"What was the shootin'?" asked the skipper.

"It was I bringing down this fine bird," said Dick, holding up what looked like a young pig. "That'll give us a welcome change of diet."

"H'm! Nobody'd think we'd been out only about a week, and have been eatin' fresh stuff most o' the time," grunted the skipper. "That there bird o' yourn is a pig, Mr. Dick. Folks has lived on this here island onct."

"That's what I was going to say to you, cap'n," interposed the mate. "So you've found it's an island, have you, sir? So've we, and we've made a great discovery what'll——"

"No greater'n mine, Mr. Wattles, I ireckon," interposed Ben Bluff, "but the sooner we get back to the schooner the better. I don't like the look o' them clouds rollin' up there to the south'ard, and the quicker we look arter the vessel the better it'll be for her."

CHAPTER X.

LIGHTENING THE VESSEL—A MUTINY.

There was still considerable time before nightfall when the skipper returned to the Sprite, and he determined to make use of this in carrying the stores ashore.

It was necessary to do this if the vessel was to be lightened, and, besides, if a storm were to arise, and any injury befall the Sprite, it was absolutely imperative that as much as possible be saved.

"All hands on deck!" shouted Ben Bluff. "Rig up the falls there, off with the fore and main hatches; look lively there, my bullies!"

Blocks were brought out, and a hoisting apparatus rigged amidships, the hatches were taken off, and while one party under the mate broke out the hold, the skipper superintended the lowering of the stores into the boat or upon the rocks, the tide being well out forward of the vessel.

Barrels of beef, cases of canned goods and things of that description were left on the rocks, while flour and goods packed in glass which would either break or be injured by the water, were taken in the boat and carried as far forward as possible.

Old Ben Bluff stumped up and down the deck, now on one tack, now on another, and occasionally coming to anchor alongside the rail and balancing himself on his wooden leg to rest the good one.

Brophy and Snitz were below with Mr. Wattles, Jack Port was in the boat, Clifford was on the rocks and Dick Port managed the guy when the goods were sent across deck to the boat or the rocks, the men remaining below hauling on the rope.

Up came a barrel of flour, and Dick was steering it toward the rail, when out of the galley came black Joe, looking more important than ever.

He was the only man beside the captain who was not working, and perhaps he felt more dignified on this account.

"Hi! you black lubber!" shouted the skipper, swinging off upon his good leg. "Why ain't you doin' something?"

Joe paused and turned to look at the skipper, and at that moment along came the barrel of flour.

"Hallo, there! get out of the way!" shouted Dick, tugging at the guy rope.

The barrel had got started, however, and its momentum could not be overcome in a moment.

It struck the big cook on the quarter, and sprawled him out on the deck in an instant.

Young Dick had to laugh, of course, and let go of the guy rope.

The barrel settled upon the small of Joe's back, and there he was, pinned to the deck.

"Hi-hi! go'ff o' me!" he howled, kicking out like a turtle, and looking not unlike one with the cask of flour on top of him.

"There you are!" laughed Dick. "Flour is down, and Joe is crushed under a falling market."

"Took dat t'ing off'n me. I tol' yo' took it off!" roared Joe, kicking and squirming. "Wha' fo' yo' wan' to frow it on me, anyhow?"

"Knocked out by a mean corn flower," chuckled Dick. "I thought you had more weight, Joe."

"Don' care if it am co'n flour or wheat flour, or Injun. I don't wan' it on me. Took it off."

"Haul up a bit below there," cried Ben Bluff. "We've flattened a nigger. Hoist away! Steady, that'll do; avast heaving."

"There you are, saved, ha, ha!" laughed Dick, steering the cask of flour toward the gangway. "How thin you look, Joe. That flour has made a pancake of you, I do believe."

"H'm! Can't yo' see whar yo' am steerin' tings?" blustered Joe. "Reckon yo' knock me down a puppus."

"Here, you black lubber, no back talk," cried Ben Bluff. "Stand by to take the things off the hooks. That'll do. We'll get a deck load now while the other folks is taking that stuff ashore."

"Don' yo' suppose I better get supper, cap'n?" asked Joe, indignant at being put to work on deck.

He was still mad at being knocked down, and wanted revenge.

Ben Bluff tacked, grabbed a belaying pin from the rail and shied it at the rebellious cook by way of answer.

Joe dodged and the pin struck the mast, rebounded, and fell down the main hatch.

Instantly a roar ascended, and Brophy, sticking his red head above the combings, demanded:

"Phwat the divil air ye doin' up there on deck at all, ye lubbers, trowin' iron belayin' pins down at a man? Wor that ye, nagur? Troth, I knew ye niver had much sinse."

"Don' yo' go ter gibin' me no sass, I'ish," retorted Joe. "I isn' no niggah, an' yo' knows um. I'se a high-toned, 'spectable col'd ge'man, I is, an' if I wan' ter frow pins at yo' I'se goin' ter."

"Begorry, thin, ye're not," retorted Brophy, beginning to clamber out upon deck, "and av yez give me any more lip I'll——"

"Belay there!" cried Ben Bluff, getting up sail and bearing down upon the belligerent Irishman and with a deft stroke of his wooden leg sending him back into the hold.

"Och chiminies! why don'd you look out once?" cried Fritz, from below. "Did you vant to broke my neck, mit falling down dot hold? For why you was not been more careless already?"

"Come, come; get to work there!" bawled the captain, "or I'll put you all in irons. Send up that stuff fast as you can, Mr. Wattles."

"Aye, aye, sir," roared the mate, and the work proceeded.

Honora Branagan came up from the cabin half an hour later in search of Joe, who should have come to the pantry long before this.

"Now, then, ye lazy nagur," she began, "what in the thunder do yez mane be loungin' about the deck and kapin' me waitin' whin there's the supper to get?"

"Ahoy, there, Irish!" cried Ben Bluff, "go ashore and find a good, dry place for them stores."

"Deed an' I won't, then," replied the stewardess, who never could be taught to pay proper respect to the skipper.

"Go ashore as I tell you," roared Ben Bluff, looking around for a belaying pin. "I have more trouble with you than any one aboard the hooker."

"Small blame to me for it, then, captain, for yez know well enough that I niver wanted to come on this trip at all. There's no luck in sailing on a Friday, and ye know it."

"Go ashore and stow them stores!" roared the skipper.

"I won't. I have the supper to get, and I have no time to fool wid yez."

"Below there! Come on deck!" commanded the skipper.

Up came the mate and the two sailors.

"Seize that mutineer!" cried Ben Bluff, and Brophy and Snitz laid forcible hands on the Amazon, both getting boxed on the ear before they succeeded in holding her still.

"I ain't got time to put ye in irons," said the skipper, "or I would. I'm captain o' this wessel, and when I says for a thing to be done, it's gotter be. Fetch out a bos'n's chair, there."

Dick brought out the boatswain's chair, which is nothing more than a piece of plank swung on ropes, and the mutinous Honora was forced to sit in it, although she had first to be tied in.

The sling was then made fast to the falls, the men laid hold upon the ropes, Dick took the guy, and the rebellious Irish-woman was hoisted up, strung out across the water and landed upon the rocks, out of the reach of the tide.

"There!" called out Ben Bluff from the bow, "I reckon when I sets out to do a thing, it's goin' to be done."

"Well, yer done it, captain; ye sint me ashore," retorted Honora; "but it took yer whole crew to do it, begorry! Wan woman aquil to four min! Faix, I wouldn't let a mon say that av me sex," and Honora tossed her head as if she, and not the skipper, had won the battle.

CHAPTER XI.

TREACHERY.

Night came on dark and threatening, a luminous streak of sulphur-colored sky on the horizon, a mass of black clouds to the southwest, and a hot, stifling feeling in the air giving promise of bad weather to come.

The work of getting the stores out of the vessel went on without cessation, for in case of a break up it was absolutely necessary that the greatest amount should be saved.

Considerable had been taken well up on shore and stored in the grove near the spring, and all hands worked with a will to get the rest out of the hold and overboard.

When it became too dark to see to work, lanterns were brought out and strung along the deck that there might be all the light obtainable.

The sulphurous light upon the horizon was visible long after the sun had set, but the sky overhead and the bank of clouds in the southwest became blacker and blacker, while the lightning became more frequent and increased in brightness, the thunder, low at first, growing louder with each succeeding peal.

The air was still heavy and stifling, and what wind there was seemed to come from some fiery furnace, it was so hot and scorching.

The tide had arisen, and the surf was higher than before, the water being white with foam all around and far in advance of the vessel.

The young ladies had been sent on shore at nightfall, and Dick and Clifford had put up a tent of sail cloth to be used as a shelter in case it rained.

A quantity of bedding was taken ashore and the girls, with

Honora to help them, fitted up temporary quarters for themselves, making them as comfortable as possible in the limited time allowed.

Clifford had returned to the vessel, and was working diligently getting out the stores, assisting at securing sail cloth, bedding, supplies, cooking utensils and anything else that might be needed.

The sky grew blacker; the lurid light on the horizon began to fade; the lightning was constantly growing more frequent and the thunder louder, although as yet the storm had not broken upon the island.

All the most necessary and most easily handled stores had been gotten out of the vessel, the heavier stuff remaining, when the breeze did completely die out, the air became stiflingly hot and sulphurous, and the sky was as black as ink.

"All hands ashore!" said the skipper. "There'll be a change presently. Mr. Wattles, take the boat and your watch and go ashore and then send it back to me."

"Aye, aye," answered the mate, and he, with the two sailors and Joe, went ashore.

"Where is Clifford?" asked Jack. "He ought to have gone ashore by this time."

"I saw him a minute ago," said Dick; "he must have gone below."

Clifford was in the shadow of the house on deck, not far from the cabin companion, but he said nothing, an evil smile passing across his face.

At that moment a roar was heard far out at sea, and a strong breath of salt-laden air fell upon the faces of those on deck.

"Hurry up with that boat!" roared the skipper. "The storm is coming!"

"Aye, aye, sir," came the voice of the mate from the side of the vessel.

"In with you, boys!" cried Ben Bluff, hurrying to the gangway.

"Where is Clifford?" cried Jack, as the roar of the approaching wave grew louder. "He can't be below at this time."

"In with you all!" cried the captain from the boat, and Dick followed.

At that moment Jack hurried down the cabin steps calling aloud for Clifford.

The man stepped hurriedly out from his place of concealment, seized a cask standing on end near the cabin and hurled it down the companion.

It struck the door, closed it, and held it firmly in place, wedged in between the sill and the bottom step.

At that instant a line of foam extending a long way in either direction could be seen rushing toward the doomed vessel, the noise becoming almost deafening.

Clifford dropped over the side of the vessel into the water and struck out vigorously for the shore, the first line of breakers striking the stern a few moments later.

Jack Port, calling for Clifford, felt a sudden shock, heard a dull sound, and stopped as if deprived of motion.

"What is that?" he gasped, darting a hasty glance over his shoulder.

Then the roar without grew louder, and as he hurried toward the companion, he felt a shock which seemed to make every timber of the little vessel quake.

Then followed the sound of a heavy body falling upon deck, and in an instant a shower of water came down the skylight, rushing in all directions.

Jack leaped toward the cabin gangway, but when he reached the door he found it fast.

"My God! I am caught in a trap!" he gasped. "The storm has broken upon us; the yacht will go to pieces, and here am I, a prisoner. What shall I do? What can I do?"

There was another shock, and the doors at the foot of the companion were suddenly forced open by a flood of water

which dashed the young fellow along the passage and into the main cabin, just as the vessel received another shock which made all her timbers creak and quiver.

Then there came a blinding flash of lightning which illuminated all the cabin, and revealed a door leading to the steering place aft.

In an instant Jack had thrown this door open and rushed up the steps to the cockpit, reaching the wheel at the very instant that a huge wave struck the stern and deluged the vessel.

The young fellow was swept off his feet and borne across the deck, and out into the yeast of waters beyond as though he had been a cork, a mere plaything.

As he was swept forward by the resistless force of the waves, a flash of lightning lighted up the vessel, and he saw the masts come crashing down as though they were twigs.

Then he was dashed onward, lifted up and flung upon the shore, stunned and unconscious, while the wave retreated, all white and seething.

As that giant wave dashed upon the level ground beyond the rocky beach, a man fled before it and hurried to the shelter of the grove.

"The Sprite is breaking up," he muttered, looking out to sea when out of danger. "I won't have any more trouble from Mr. Jack Port. How fortunate that Dick said I was below. It was the merest accident, but it rids me of my rival forever."

Reaching the grove, Clifford turned and hurried toward the point where the boat had landed a moment before, meeting Ben Bluff, the mate and Dick Port hurrying up the slope.

"Have you seen him?" he asked. "Where is Jack?"

"I don't know," said Dick. "Didn't you meet him? He went below for you, didn't he?"

"No; I met him at the head of the companion. You had just gone; we could not make you hear; the breakers were almost upon us; we leaped into the sea and struck out boldly for the shore; then a huge wave struck us and—oh, I cannot bear to think of it—I never saw him again; he must be—haven't you seen him?"

"No," said Dick, with a sob; "but let us search for him; perhaps he was thrown on shore. Whereabouts did you land?"

"Almost at this very spot," said Clifford. "I heard you coming and thought that Jack might be with you."

"I've got a light," said the mate, who carried a lantern. "Let's look along shore and maybe we'll find him."

"Yes, we must save the poor fellow," exclaimed Clifford, hurriedly. "He may have been thrown ashore unconscious, and the next wave will carry him back again, if we do not hasten. Come, it cannot be far from here where he came ashore."

The hypocrite, pretending a grief that he did not feel, led the way along the coast in a direction which took him away from the spot where he had come ashore, not that he feared to come upon the dead body of his companion, but in order to more completely deceive the others.

Up and down they searched, but found no trace of poor Jack, until at last those who did not know the truth were forced to believe him dead.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MISSING FOUND—CLIFFORD'S SURPRISE.

When the sun arose the next morning nothing was seen of the Sprite but scattered fragments strewn along the shore, here a spar, there a mass of broken timbers, yonder a part of the house half buried in the sand, or a tangled mass of cordage caught upon the sharp rocks and swaying to and fro with every wave.

For some distance the shore was strewn with barrels, chests,

or boxes, some close at hand, some far away, as though the sea had meant to make the work of destruction as complete as possible.

The vessel had been entirely destroyed, the huge waves which broke over her as she lay exposed to their fury, held fast by sharp coral, having soon rent her timbers asunder and scattered them broadcast.

As soon as the first streak of gray light appeared in the east, old Ben Bluff stumped down to the shore where the surf was still rushing up the beach in tumultuous billows, and gazed sadly at the wreck of his beloved vessel.

"Not so much as a stick left standing; not a plank left to stand on," he muttered. "Cast away, nobody knows where, perhaps never to see the old home again. Well, I never thought that the last v'y'ge of old Ben Bluff would end like this."

As soon as the sun had arisen all hands assembled on the shore, and efforts made to save whatever could be saved, barrels and boxes placed together, timbers dragged from the water or drawn out of the sand, and everything that could be of any use secured at once.

Two chests of tools had been saved, and there were, besides, doors, the timbers of the house on deck, several coil of rope, a large quantity of sail cloth, and many other things that could be of use in building a house.

Mr. Wattles thought of the stone house discovered the day before on the opposite side of the island, but the strange experience he had there deterred him from suggesting that they make the place their future residence.

"Like as not the place is haunted," he muttered, "and nobody knows what nests of snakes and spiders and all them p'ison things there mayn't be in the place. No; I reckon we're safer where we be."

There being all the materials for a house at hand, as well as the tools with which to build it, the work was begun at once, the site selected being the little grove where the shelter had been erected the previous night.

While the men were at work clearing the ground, cutting down trees, sawing timbers, and otherwise getting ready for the building of the house, Kitty took a small pail and went to the spring for water, while Ida assisted Honora in preparing dinner.

Having filled her pail, the young girl went out into the open, intending to return that way instead of through the grove.

She had taken a few steps only when, to her intense surprise, she saw a man lying stretched out beside a bush, half buried in sand, his arms stretched out to their full extent, and his face turned toward the sky.

With a stifled cry upon her lips she sprang forward, knelt at the man's side, and gazed wildly upon his pale, bloodless face.

Dipping both her hands into the pail, she scattered the contents over the white face, and then put her ear close to the man's breast.

It was Jack, but whether he was alive or dead was something that as yet she could not determine.

She smoothed away the tangled hair from the pale forehead, bathed the face tenderly, and raising one of the outstretched hands, felt of the pulse to see if her darling still lived.

In that moment she felt that she loved the man more than she had dreamed, would be willing to give up everything that he might live, even her own life.

Presently she felt a glad thrill sweep through her, and the tears welled from her eyes as her ears caught a faint sigh, a slight breath fell upon her cheek, and the eyes of her lover slowly opened.

"Thank God!" she murmured, overjoyed, as she raised Jack's head and held him in her arms. "You are not dead; you live—thank God! you live!"

Jack looked at the young girl, and then cast an inquiring glance all around, while a troubled look came into his face.

"Where is the yacht?" he asked, faintly.

"This is the island; don't you remember the place we came to after the storm?"

"The island—the storm?" repeated Jack, passing his hand wearily across his forehead. "Oh, yes; I remember; we were caught by a cyclone; we lost all our instruments; we were driven we knew not where, and then—we were wrecked here, cast upon this island, last night. Were any others saved besides ourselves?"

"Yes; we were all saved, Jack, all of us."

"Does the skipper know where we are?" asked Jack, growing stronger.

"Oh, yes; we are on an island," said Kitty, who saw that Jack had evidently forgotten about their arrival at the island and only remembered the storm.

He presently arose, and leaning on her arm, went with her to the camp, Kitty giving the skipper, whom she first met, a warning glance, as she said:

"Here is another, captain; and now we are all together."

"Aha, Jack, my boy, glad to see you," said honest Ben Bluff, seizing the young fellow's hand. "Sit down, lad, ye must be worn out with fighting the waves; but we're all safe now, and not a man missing."

Dick Port came up at that moment, and Kitty, darting quickly to his side, said:

"Jack has been found, but his memory seems affected. He thinks that we came here last night for the first time; he only remembers the tornado. We had best humor him."

"Alive!" gasped Dick. "I had scarcely dared hope that. He must have been carried to a greater distance than we thought."

The young fellow went to his brother at once, and found that he had received a bad wound on the head, and this it was, no doubt, that caused him to forget what had recently happened, and remember only those events which had taken place previously.

Dick bathed his brother's wound, and gave him some light but nourishing food and drink, and at last saw with gratitude that he seemed to be greatly improved and to be on the way to recovery.

Clifford did not know of Jack's being alive until noon, and when he came in to dinner with the rest of the workers, by which time Jack had just awakened greatly refreshed.

"How are you, Clifford?" he said, cordially. "Glad to see you. We have found land at last, I see. The poor Sprite is no more, though. We must have struck heavily to have her go to pieces so soon. I remember being thrown into the water the moment we grounded, but after that things seem a bit confused. What sort of a place is it we've found? They tell me it's an island, but I suppose nobody knows whereabouts it is?"

When Jack began to speak, Clifford was in terror lest the young man would accuse him of having sought his life; that, more than the fact of finding him still alive when he believed him dead, causing him fear, but, as he went on, it was plain that Jack's memory was at fault, and the treacherous rival breathed more freely.

"He remembers nothing," he thought, with a feeling of exultation. "He cannot accuse me; my story will never be doubted, and I am safe; yes, and more than that, he shall never possess the girl I love. His memory is gone, his brain is affected, he is a wreck of his old self, he will excite only pity, while—I—will make her love me, and she shall be my wife. Things have turned out well, and the prize is mine."

As the days passed, however, and Jack did his share of the work with the rest, it could be easily seen that his mind was as clear as ever, with simply that one lapse of memory as to what happened that second night at the island, and as Clifford noticed the increased tenderness between the lovers, a jealous rage filled his breast, and he hissed:

"So! I am to be cheated of my reward. No, I will not be. I

have sworn to possess her and I will, in spite of all. So have a care, Jack, how you thwart me!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

At the end of a week there was a comfortable house on the island, large enough to hold all the castaways, all hands having assisted in its erection.

A flagstaff, from which floated the Stars and Stripes, had been placed in front, and inside everything was ship shape, according to the ideas of old Ben Bluff, who determined to have the place as much like a ship as possible.

Over the front entrance was a porch, and surmounting this was a frame supporting the ship's bell, which was reached by a stationary ladder, the hours and half hours being told off, day and night, as though the crew were still afloat.

The beds were bunks, the kitchen was the galley, the sitting-room was the cabin, and, in short, all the rules and regulations that had obtained in Ben Bluff's cottage in the quiet New England village, were in force on the island.

The house was built of the timbers of the yacht, helped out by trees which the castaways had felled, the doors and windows doing service for the new home, as well as the furniture, nearly all of which had been saved in more or less good condition.

As regarded the question of living on the island, there was no fear on that score, as they had stores enough to last all hands a year; and, besides this, the island was well stocked with fruit and vegetables, to say nothing of pigs, poultry, goats, birds, and other food animals.

There was no question that the island had been inhabited at one time, and that the sheep, pigs, goats and fowl to be found upon it had descended from the original stock placed there, and increasing until there was no danger of the supply of food giving out, even had the number of the castaways been twice as great.

There was powder and ball in the cabin of the yacht sufficient to last a considerable time, but there was little occasion for using ammunition, as traps were easily made, and the crew were adept pig-stickers, and could bring in a fine fat shoat or lamb or brace of fowl whenever they were required.

"Now," said Ben Bluff, when the house was furnished, and all hands were living at their ease, "here we are anchored on shore, and I want ye all to understand that I'm just as much the skipper here as if we was floatin' on the briny deep, and any one what mutinies will get in irons. Stop laughin', you red-headed she-dragon. What do you mean by it?"

"Nothing at all, captain dear," answered Honora, who had offended on this particular occasion, the skipper making his speech at the dinner table, "only as we have no irons, it'll be hard to put anny wan in them, I reckon."

"Don't you fret about that, cook," growled the skipper. "If you do anythin' agin the rules, you'll find the irons fast enough."

"Is it flat irons ye mane, captain?" asked the incorrigible cook. "If that's it, we have them; but they're a bit rusty, and I can't find anny wax, for the reason that the nagur do be takin' it to pint the inds av his mustache, bad manners to 'im."

"Don' yo' bleve dat, cap'n," protested Joe, who waddled in with the dessert. "Dat I'ishwoman's all de time sayin' suthin' 'bout me. Jes, yo' gib de odah fo' she to be put in irons, an'——"

"Belay thar, you lubber!" roared the skipper, looking around for something to hurl at the garrulous negro, and Joe became silent.

Now that the discipline was once more restored, Ben Bluff thought it proper to improve the island as much as possible, and with this end in view, various public works were begun and carried on by the men during the day watches.

First, a stone wharf was to be built, then a stockade around the house, and stone walks laid from the house to the wharf, and along shore as far as the cliffs in one direction, and to the mouth of a deep creek in another, it being proposed, in time, to put the entire island under cultivation, to build houses, lay roads, and, in short, lay the foundation of a great republic in this unknown land.

"Nobody knows where we are, and how long we are got to stay," explained the skipper, "and they ain't no harm in layin' out work to do even supposing it ain't all finished."

"I'm for exploring that old house again," suggested Dick. "We were frightened away for nothing that day, and we ought to go back and see what there is there."

"You can take a cruise there some day when it's your watch below," grunted the skipper, who would allow no change to be made in his man-of-war regulations, even although they were now settled on land.

Honora made the most objection to this way of living, and it had its disadvantages as far as she was concerned, although the others might put up with it.

"The idee av rousing a girl up in the middle av the night affther a short four hours sleep just for the whim av that ould lunatic," she would protest, when called in the middle watch. "Go an wid yez and don't bother me. I'll not get up for ye," and more than half the time she would not.

Dick made up his mind to make a thorough examination of the old stone house, as he was sure that some record of the former inhabitants of the island would be found there.

The strange noises that had frightened them upon their first visit were due to some natural cause, Dick persisted, and were not uttered by ghosts, evil spirits, or anything of the kind, as the sailors insisted.

"I don't believe in such nonsense," declared Dick, "and I'm going to give the old place a thorough overhauling."

"I'll go with you, Dick," added Clifford, "for I don't take any more stock in these ghost stories than you do."

"I'm with you, too, Dick," said Jack, "and I propose that we visit the place at once."

The three young men, armed with guns and an ax for clearing away the underbrush, started early one morning, before sunrise, in fact, and took the most direct way to the old stone house.

They reached the grove in which it stood after something more than an hour's tramp, and pausing a few minutes to clear a better pathway, boldly advanced.

The door they had pushed open upon their first visit was now closed, and they looked at each other in surprise.

"Didn't we leave it open when we went away?" asked Dick.

"We certainly did," assented Clifford. "This seems very strange."

"Oh, bother, some of the men have been here since, and have closed it to keep the pigs and goats out," said Jack, impatiently. "Come on; we can easily open it."

"I wouldn't, Jack!" cried Clifford, hastily, as Jack sprang forward. "Perhaps, after all, there are others on the island besides ourselves, and——"

Unheeding the warning, Jack dashed forward, threw himself against the door and forced it in.

As he did so there was a puff of smoke, a loud report, and then the whizzing of a bullet through the leaves beyond.

Jack fell to his knees in front of the door, his face as white as ashes, and a red line on one temple, as though a knife had been passed across it.

"Good Heaven! what has happened?" cried Dick, springing

forward and seizing his brother in his arms. "Speak, Jack, are you hurt?"

Jack arose to his feet with Dick's help, for he seemed too weak to stand alone, and said faintly:

"Who fired that shot, Dick? Was it an accident, or what?"

The door was now lying flat on the ground, and from the darkness of the old house came a wreath of gunpowder smoke showing that the shot, whoever had fired it, came from within.

"Are you hit, Jack?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"No, I think not, or at least not more than a scratch. I stood sideways to the door and threw my shoulder against it. Otherwise I should have received that shot full in the breast."

"Come away," said Clifford. "We shall only be exposing ourselves needlessly in trying to enter the place. Some one is within, and they have us at a disadvantage."

"Yes; we shall gain nothing," said Jack. "We'd better give it up."

"Not a bit of it," said Dick, boldly, unslinging his rifle. "I am going in. Ahoy there! I am going in, and if you don't like it, say so at once."

Then, with his rifle at full cock, and ready to throw to his shoulder in an instant, the daring young fellow entered the mysterious house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE STONE HOUSE.

Advancing two or three paces into the room, casting quick glances on either side, and listening for the slightest sound, Dick called out resolutely:

"Who is there? Let him come out, whether friend or enemy, and not skulk in the dark like a coward."

There was no answer, and Clifford and Jack followed the brave lad, Jack exclaiming:

"Come away, Dick, come away. You can hardly expect an enemy to show himself."

"He must," muttered Dick, resolutely, advancing another step, "or I shall——"

At that instant the same blood-curdling shriek that had before alarmed them echoed through the place.

Dick threw his gun to his shoulder and fired in the direction of the sound, the report echoing like a thunder-clap from the stone walls.

The terrible shriek was repeated, and Dick, brave as he was, and fully determined to fathom this mystery, was forced to retreat.

The three young men halted a few paces from the house, and Dick, reloading, said firmly:

"I'd like to pound myself for getting so scared. I didn't suppose that mere screams would frighten me. I know what it is."

"What is it?" asked Clifford and Jack in a breath.

"It's some crazy fellow who has been cast away on the island like ourselves, and having no companions he has gone mad. He can't hurt any one."

"He is armed, at all events," said Clifford, "and you can't tell what mad fancies he may take. I think we had better leave him alone for the present."

"Clifford is quite right," added Jack, "and I don't like to have you expose yourself needlessly, Dick."

"Perhaps I have already finished him," replied the younger brother. "That shot of mine must have——"

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" sounded that terrible laugh from within the old house.

The three explorers took to their heels and paused only when they reached the open space overlooking the sea.

"It's no use at all," cried Dick impatiently. "A fellow can't get accustomed to a sound like that. Maybe if I hadn't been brought up in a mad-house, I wouldn't mind it, but it takes the starch out of me in spite of myself."

"I think we are wise in giving the place a wide berth," said Clifford. "You are certainly right about the house being occupied by some poor, mad sailor, but madmen are not always harmless, and the less we meddle with this one the better."

"Yes," said Jack, with a tremor in his voice. "I had a narrow escape of it myself. That bullet just grazed my temple, and——"

"What's this on your shoulder?" interposed Dick. "There is a hole right through your shirt, and, see, there is blood!"

The young fellow turned back the collar of his brother's shirt, and there, on the left shoulder, was a lump of clotted blood, showing where the flesh had been plowed by a bullet.

"The fellow must have a regular battery with him," muttered Dick. "I know that it seemed to me that a dozen bullets cut through the leaves, and here are two, certainly, that——"

"Yes, and here is another," said Jack, showing a hole in his sleeve. "That one went through without doing any damage."

"I wish now I'd hit the fellow," said Dick, doggedly. "He certainly meant to kill you, and it wasn't his fault that he did not. Come, I don't seem to care so much about going through the place as I did. We'll have to get the madman out of that, however, one of these days."

The party now went down to the beach, and Jack's wounds, which now began to smart, were attended to.

Dick found a spring of water not far away, and tearing his handkerchief in strips, he crushed the leaves of a plant which he found growing in the wood, made a poultice, and bound it upon the wound upon his brother's shoulder, fastening a wet bandage about his head, the simple treatment bringing considerable relief.

"What's the use of studying medicine if you don't put what you learn to some use?" remarked Dick, when he had finished. "It's lucky that I knew that that plant was a healing one."

"We shall have to appoint you the physician to the yacht's company, Master Dick," said Clifford. "You are really quite indispensable."

"I accept the position," said Dick, smiling, "although I hope I shall not be called upon to give my valuable services often."

"Shall we make any more explorations?" asked Clifford, "or had we better return to the camp? There is no danger of our meeting the crazy man, I suppose?"

"I would not mind if I did," said Dick, "provided it was in the open ground where I would have the same advantages he has; but I don't like this fighting in the dark, where you never know when you may get shot in the head."

"It is just as well to keep clear of the place until all hands can be present," added Clifford, who seemed desirous of avoiding the old house.

"Come," said Dick, "suppose we follow the shore and go home by way of the cliffs. Do you know, I am quite anxious to see what that iron ring that Uncle Ben found in the rock may mean. There must be some secret cave in the cliff."

The three set out along the shore, but were presently forced to leave it, as the road was impassable.

They struck through the wood, where the path was so well defined, and after an hour's tramp, came out in sight of the sea at a point considerably to the south of the cliff.

By this time it was well on toward noon, and Jack suggested that they return to camp, as they still had a long walk before them.

When they reached the house they found Ben Bluff standing in front of the house in full captain's uniform, with a sword at his side, and a brace of pistols in his belt.

"What's the matter, Uncle Ben?" asked Dick. "Do you ex-

pect a visit from the admiral of the fleet, or has a hostile vessel appeared in the offing?"

"What does this mean, you young rascal?" demanded the skipper, gruffly, swinging around so as to face Dick. "Where have you three mutinous young pirates been all morning?"

"Exploring the island," answered Dick. "It was our watch below, and you said we could do what we liked then."

"Yes, you saucy lubber, but not without lettin' the skipper or Mr. Wattles know where you was!" roared the old disciplinarian. "You left the ship without permission, and I've a mind to put you in irons for it."

"Well, but you weren't up when we went ashore, sir," said Dick, with a laugh, "and we didn't want to disturb you."

The skipper hopped upon his good leg and swung around with his peg at right angles to it, intending to catch Dick a blow with it in the shins, a favorite practice of his.

Dick jumped aside nimbly, however, and the result was that the skipper spun around and sat down somewhat heavily upon a bench alongside the door of the house.

"Avast there! What do you mean by that, you young monkey?" he roared. "You'll stay on deck this afternoon for that, do you mind?"

"I expected to," chuckled Dick, as he ran off, seeing the two girls approaching.

"Been in an engagement, have you, Jack?" asked the skipper. "What have you got your head triced up for like that?"

"We had a little adventure at the old stone house on the other side of the island, sir," answered Jack. "It seems that we have a companion on the island, sir."

"Yes; and a poor, mad sailor," added Clifford, "and he does not seem to like our intruding upon his quarters."

"A crazy man upon the island?" muttered the skipper. "What does he look like? Maybe he can tell us where this blessed lost land is. Did ye ask him?"

"We did not see him, sir," said Jack. "He kept out of sight, but we heard him, and he fired on us, and I got hit."

"H'm! Tell me about it, my boy," muttered the captain, anxiously, who forgot all about his iron-clad rules and regulations now that he knew that his nephew had been in danger.

The girls and Dick now came up, and Clifford noticed with jealous hate that Kitty was all concern, all attention to Jack, and scarcely noticed himself.

"You are not badly hurt?" she asked as Jack began his story, her face paling, her voice assuming a tender tone, and her entire manner showing the alarm she felt.

"No, no, it is only a scratch," said Jack; "it is nothing; it will not amount to anything; you must not alarm yourself needlessly."

"But you will not risk your life again; you will not go near that dreadful creature?" she asked in a tone of entreaty.

"No," said Jack, while Clifford muttered to himself:

"Another miss; but next time I shall not fail, you may be sure."

CHAPTER XV.

MORE TROUBLE WITH THE CREW.

"Look alive there now, my bullies! Stir your stumps, all hands! Don't you know it's eight bells? Where's the watch there? Turn out, everybody, for drill and inspection. Look sharp there, I say!"

Brophy had just struck the bell for eight bells, or four o'clock in the afternoon, and as the dog-watches now began, it was the duty of all hands to appear.

The skipper had come out in full uniform, and it was his gruff tones which were now heard.

The mate came hurrying out of the house, Yacob and Brophy were already in their places near the door, Joe came puffing from the kitchen, arrayed in white jacket and cap, while Jack, Dick and Clifford came running from the shore where they had been engaged in getting out stones for the pier.

"Inspection, you lubbers!" roared Ben Bluff, a big, brass trumpet in his hand. "What sort of show do you suppose you make? Where's your togs, you swabs?"

"This isn't Sunday, uncle Ben," said Dick. "You don't have inspection every day in the week."

"Belay that, you pirate!" growled the captain. "Let me tell ye, sir, that I have inspection on this ship whenever I think proper."

"Yes, sir, but in the navy——"

"Belay it, I say!" came the bellowed interruption. "I'm admiral and commodore and cap'n and the whole fleet in these here waters and they ain't nobody to give me orders. Brophy!"

"Yis, sor!" promptly answered the bowlegged Irishman, touching his cap.

"Run up the colors, you fiery-headed son of a carrot!"

"Yis, sor!" and up went the good old flag, fluttering in the breeze as it reached the top of the pole and was unfurled.

"Mr. Wattles!" cried Ben Bluff.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Let the band play Hail Columby or suthin', sir."

"Yes, sir," said the mate, with great promptness, while Dick grinned.

The two girls now came up, having been for a walk, and the skipper hailed them.

"Young ladies, attention!"

"Aye, aye, captain," cried Ida, coming to a halt, and standing as rigid as any soldier.

"This is inspection. Take your places for'ard of the main-mast."

All hands were now drawn up in line, and the skipper marched out in front and surveyed them critically:

"Eyes right, chests out, shoulders back, attention! Mr. Wattles!"

"Yes, sir."

"One o' your watch is missin'."

"I think not, sir."

"Yes, there is!" with a roar. "Don't you think I know every mother's son of my crew, sir?"

"There ain't none of 'em missin', sir," replied the mate.

"Yes, there is. Where's that red-headed dragon of a cook?"

"She ain't a mother's son, sir," chuckled Dick, who never would remember naval discipline when he scented a joke.

"Silence, you young stowaway!" cried the captain. "Nobody told you to speak. Mr. Wattles!"

"Yes, sir."

"Send for the cook."

"She am in de kitchen, I specs," said black Joe, "and I don't blebe she wan's to be boddered."

"Go fetch her here, you black son of a shoe brush," commanded the skipper, in his most thunderous tones.

Away went Joe to the kitchen, where Honora was up to her elbows in flour, preparing a lot of dumplings for dinner.

"De cap'n he wan' yo' fo' inspekshun, I'ish," he announced.

"Go on wid yez, don't ye see I'm busy? Go tell the old fuss that I can't come."

"I ain' gwine to took no sech message as dem to de cap'n," returned Joe. "Yo' gotter come, an' dat settles it."

"'Deed thin it doesn't, and I'm not goin, an' yez can put thot in yer poipe and smoke it, nagur."

"I done tol yo' yo' gotter come," persisted Joe, seizing Honora by the arm.

In another moment Joe felt sorry he had been so persistent.

Honora raised her big white hand full of flour and smote him in the face, while with her left she fetched him such a buffet on the ear as made it ring.

Joe beat a retreat at once, and dashed out of the house and in the presence of the crew, looking like another man.

His black face was white, but it was not the whiteness of the proud Caucasian, but more like the graveyard pallor of a sheeted ghost, while here and there the original Ham shone through the veneering of flour.

"She done say she wouldn't come, cap'n," said Joe, unaware of the comical appearance he made.

The girls giggled, Dick howled, Mr. Wattles guffawed, Brophy roared, Yacob opened his mouth so wide that the top of his head appeared in danger of coming off, and all hands except the captain made some demonstration of mirth.

"Och, chiminies, yust look off dat plack mans once," cried Snitz. "He has been white already by a minute."

"Wud yez luck at de nagur?" asked Jim Brophy. "Was he skinned, or phat's the matter wid um?"

"Attention!" bellowed Ben Bluff. "What do you mean by coming out here in that fashion, ye black ruffian."

Joe put his hand to his face and wiped off several ounces of flour, thus discovering why all the rest of the crew laughed.

"Reckon dat I'ish gal do dat, cap'n," he explained. "She am a terror, she am. She say she wouldn't come, an' I jes' blebe she mean it."

"Brophy! Yacob!" cried the skipper.

"Yis, sor."

"Ya, cabdin."

"Go and bring that mutinous Irish cook out here, and don't take no for an answer."

"You was want me to bring dot vomans, deat or alife, cabdin?"

"No, you son of a Dutch cabbage; bring her alive."

The ill-assorted pair went into the house and proceeded to deliver the captain's orders to Honora.

They fared no better than black Joe had, for in a few minutes they both came running out, Brophy with a flour sieve on his head, and Snitz with a rolling pin flying about his ears.

"Mein soul, cabdin," said Yacob, "dot vomans was a gaution. You don'd can do noddings mit her."

"Begorry, she aquils a throop av sojers for gettin' rid av her inimies," added Brophy. "Hadt'n't yez betther go afther her yersilf, cap'n dear?"

"Dick!" cried the skipper, with never a smile on his weather-beaten visage, "go bring that troublesome Irishwoman out here, or I'll have to put all hands in irons."

"Aye, aye," cried Dick, picking up a bit of rope which lay near the door and going in.

"See here, Honora," he said, as he went into the kitchen, "why don't you come when the captain sends for you? Here you are, keeping all hands waiting just for your obstinacy."

"Yis; and av I go the dumplin's will be sp'iled, and all for that ould woman of a skipper wid his ordhers and his dhrills and his inspections and all that, and not a ship in sight. Faix, if I could get away from the place I'd give up me sittiwation to-morrer."

"Well, the skipper says you must come," said Dick, with one hand behind his back.

"Phat's that yez have behind yer back, Masther Dick?" asked Honora, suspiciously. "It's not the irons, is it?"

"No," said Dick; "but it's a great big snake, and I'm going to thrash you with it if——"

Honora uttered a scream as Dick suddenly produced the length of rope and began whirling it through the air, and with one bound she dashed out of the kitchen, Dick following at his leisure, and with a broad grin on his roguish face.

"Strategy generally succeeds where force won't work," he

remarked, as he took his place in line, and the inspection proceeded.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK'S DISCOVERY.

The work on the pier went along rapidly, and little time was left for the exploration of the island, the skipper believing that it was better to make their home comfortable and to complete the necessary improvements than to spend their time running about the island.

The sailors had a superstitious dread of visiting the old stone house on the other side of the island, and Clifford took care to fasten this and to excite their imagination by tales of what he had heard and seen there.

Dick Port, merry and mischief-loving though he was, at times had nevertheless a grain of seriousness in his composition, and he was not satisfied to let the mystery of the old house go unsolved.

He thought it strange that no one had seen the maniac, and was determined to find out who and what he was, despite all risks.

Three or four days after the last visit to the old house, he set out one Sunday morning, when no one was at work, for Ben Bluff was a good old Methodist, and always kept the Sabbath, and took his way to the other side of the island without telling any one where he was going.

In fact, he was at some pains to conceal his departure, and slipped off without being noticed or even missed until he was well on his way.

He was provided with a rifle, and had a hatchet swung at his belt, for if he happened to come to close range with the mysterious madman, the latter would be a more effective weapon than a rifle.

He reached the house in about an hour and a half, and to his surprise he found the door open instead of shut as he expected.

All was quiet about the old house, and there was such a restful atmosphere over all that one could scarcely believe it to be the abode of such a terrible creature as the madman was thought to be.

The young fellow determined to be cautious, and he therefore made his way along the front of the house, in order to see if there were not some means of reaching the rear.

Upon coming to the corner, he found a wall inclosing a small track of ground; but it was impossible to follow this, as the trees had grown so thickly about it that in places it could hardly be seen.

He managed to make out where the angle was, however, and followed the turn for about twenty feet, although he could get no nearer than three or four feet.

Retracing his steps, he was within a few yards of the door when that awful laugh rang out upon the air, and he stopped, nearly petrified with surprise.

"I won't stop," he said, in a tone of determination. "I must learn what this means." And then, rifle in hand, he advanced boldly and entered the door.

"Who is here?" he cried, in a loud tone. "Speak! Who is here, I say?"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" was the answer, as though some one had been seized with an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

There was something uncanny in the laugh, although it was not so terrifying as the other outburst had been, being rather the mirth of some good-natured, jolly fellow, than the blood-curdling laugh of a madman.

"Stop your laughing," commanded Dick. "I will not be tri-

fled with. "Who is here, I say?" and he advanced resolutely, although the place was as dark as a tomb.

Then, for the first time, he saw two gleaming balls of fire shining in the darkness, and a strange thrill came over him.

"The place is the lair of some wild beast," he muttered, "and it is that which has uttered this strange laughing sound. What can it be?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the sound again, and, aiming at the two balls of fire, which he took to be the eyes of the animal, Dick fired.

There was a shriek, a whirring sound, and some large object dashed past his head, knocking off his hat and whizzing out at the door.

Alarmed, but with his wits still about him, Dick turned and rushed out of the house, being just in time to see a large bird, greatly resembling an owl, fly clumsily into a tree near by, where it disappeared among the branches, at the same time uttering the same laughing sound that had so alarmed him upon previous occasions.

The mystery was explained, and the madman of the old stone house was nothing but a strange bird after all.

"Well, of all things!" laughed Dick. "So it is that thing that has frightened us, is it? An owl or some such thing, and we thought it a madman."

Another thought presently crossed his mind, however, and the mystery was still unsolved.

Who had fired the shot when Jack had tried to force open the door upon their last visit to the stone house?

The owl had not, certainly, and perhaps, after all, there was still a madman, and the owl was his companion.

"I can't understand it," mused Dick. "The laugh is all right, but who fired the shot that nearly finished poor Jack? It seems to me that the mystery is as deep as ever."

Having come here to solve the problem, however, Dick was not going away until he had done so, and he now gathered a quantity of dry wood, carried it to the entrance of the house and set fire to it.

A ruddy blaze soon sprang up and Dick added to the pile, so that in a few moments the whole interior of the house was lighted up.

A room fifteen feet square appeared, and on the side opposite the door were windows, boarded up, and excluding all light, two doors appearing in one of the angles.

The branch of a tree had made its way through the roof at one point, and it was on this that the owl had its perch, as could be seen by the worn appearance of the bark, the limb being nearly dead.

Hurriedly crossing the space before him, Dick hurled all his weight upon one of the window shutters and forced it from its place, letting in considerable light.

The removal of a second shutter made the place lighter still, and when Dick had cut away the branches that hung across the openings, there was scarcely any need of the fire, the place being now light enough to make things plain.

No one appeared in all this time, and Dick saw no evidences of human occupancy about the place, for although in an inner room to which he presently penetrated he found a solid oaken table thickly coated with dust and hung about with spiders' webs, he saw no food, no remains of a fire, no footprints nor any other sign of life.

He had taken a torch with him into the inner room, and so was able to see without difficulty, and breaking down a door which he discovered, he found that it led to the front of the house, and was one of those already seen, but not opened.

"It's my opinion that there is no madman at all," the young fellow muttered, as he came out, "and that we were frightened for nothing."

This conclusion left the mystery of the shot fired at Jack

still a mystery, however, for there was no other way of explaining it.

"At all events, if there is a madman, he is not here now," observed Dick; "and when he returns he will find his house in better condition than when he left it."

Returning to the interior and cutting away more branches, Dick now turned his attention to the second of the two doors in the angle in the wall.

It appeared to be locked, but a few blows of the hatchet removed one of the panels, and inserting both hands in the gap, Dick tore it from its hinges, which were nearly rusted through.

A deep closet with shelves appeared, and on one of the shelves was a dust-covered volume, with huge brass clasps and corners.

Opening the book, Dick found that it was a Bible, but the fly-leaf at the front was covered with fine writing in some foreign language, with this line in English at the bottom:

"And this . . . strange secret . . . buried treasure . . . pirate."

"Buried treasure!" cried Dick. "Then, after all, I have discovered the key to one mystery, even if the other still baffles me."

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE FLY LEAF.

The Sunday dinner at the "Ship," as the cottage on the island was called, was an affair of considerable state as well as renown, for all hands were present, no one having to stand a watch on deck on that day.

It was more like a family dinner at home than a meal on ship, for on Sunday the skipper's rules and regulations and nautical discipline seemed to be done away with, and he was more like the jolly father of a large family than the commander.

At the midday meal on this particular Sunday there were matters of more than usual interest to talk about, the principal one, of course, being Dick's strange discovery in the old house.

"You wasn't present to prayers this mornin', young feller," the skipper said, when Dick returned shortly before dinner was served. "What's your excuse? Don't ye know that we allus has 'em, and that nobody stays away 'less they're sick?"

"You didn't say anything about them this morning, Uncle Ben, and the fact of the matter is I did not think of them," said Dick, frankly. "But I've made a great discovery, sir, and I know you'll be glad to hear of it. There is a buried treasure on the island, and I can tell you all——"

"Belay there!" growled Ben Bluff. "Whatever ye know keep it to yourself till after dinner."

Nothing more was said, therefore, but when dessert was brought in, and all hands were present, the skipper astonished the company by saying:

"Now, then, Dick, what about that treasure of yours what you've discovered on this here island?"

"Well, it's a long story, sir," said Dick, while all the rest looked on in surprise, "and perhaps I had better make a clean start and tell how I found out about it."

The young fellow then proceeded to relate his adventures at the old stone house, the discovery of the secret of that strange laugh so many of them heard, the finding of the old brass-bound Bible and the strange words which it contained.

All of his listeners paid the most rapt attention, and especially Clifford, who did not take his eyes from Dick during the whole time that the latter was explaining how he had discovered the true author of that weird laugh.

"He has not discovered as much as I feared," thought Clifford. "He does not know the whole truth, I can see; he has only learned a part of it, and my secret is safe. It is a good thing I removed the evidences of my part in the matter."

"This 'ere is all very interestin', sir," said the captain. "The writin' is in Spanish, ye say? Have ye got the book with ye?"

"Yes, sir," said Dick, leaving the table for a moment and bringing the book from his locker where he had placed it. "I think it is Spanish, but it may be Italian or French. I am not very strong on foreign languages, I must confess."

The book was placed upon the table, and the two girls, Clifford and Jack Port looked attentively at it.

"It looks like French," said Kitty.

"I see some Spanish words," added Ida. "Perhaps it is a mixture of both."

"You used to know a smatterin' of them lingoos, didn't ye, Mr. Wattles?" asked Ben Bluff, turning to the mate.

"I did, sir, to speak 'em, but not to see 'em writ out. Let Mr. Dick or the young lady say 'em over and perhaps I mought get a reckonin' o' some kind."

"Here is a sentence," said Clifford, "which means, 'search for the hidden treasure in the blue cave,' whatever that means. It is in Spanish, but very old Spanish, I would think."

"Here is something about the blue chamber in French," cried Kitty. "It says 'the blue chamber is the lowest of all, and to reach it one must encounter great,' I don't know what—danger, I suppose."

"Well, we're beginning to get at it," muttered Ben Bluff, "an' now suppose we begin at the top and read it down, fust one, and then another, till we get the whole log."

In this manner they managed to make sense out of nearly the whole page, which, when put into good English by Dick, read as follows:

"In the year 1729, the first of the great treasure placed upon this island was hidden in the blue chamber, which is the lowest of all in the great cavern, and to reach it one must encounter great perils, the green staircase which leads to nothing, the lair of the serpents, and the death chamber which no one dare enter. The cave is reached from the cliff where the iron ring must be turned to the east when the stone can be lifted. The whole of the treasure in gold, jewels and precious stones was left here by Sanche the pirate. Doomed to die on the island I have discovered the hiding place, and to any one who comes here after me I leave the secret, hoping it may benefit him more than me, who shall lay my poor bones on this lonely spot to be forgotten."

"That's plain enough," said Ben Bluff, "as fur as the treasure is consarned; but it don't throw much light on the feller who writ this, nor how he got here. I reckon he wasn't a pirate, 'cause such villains never trouble themselves with Bibles."

"You were close upon the discovery of the cave the other day," said Jack, "but it may be as well that you did not find it, for this letter speaks of dangers which you might have stumbled into without knowing the risks you ran."

"I reckon them snakes was enough to startle any one," declared Ben Bluff, "and then we might ha' pulled at that iron ring all day, and never thought o' giving it a turn. I wish the feller had said where the island is, though. That's what I care fur more'n to find a lot o' gold an' di'monds what we ain't got no use for."

"No use for, captain?" cried Kitty. "I'd like to have a few rings, a necklace and a pair of bracelets. I think I could find a use for them."

"You couldn't get off the island any sooner if you had 'em, could ye, missy?" queried Ben Bluff.

"No; of course not; but when I did get off I'd have them."

"Very true, missy; but this here feller what writ this piece in his Bible, he didn't get off, it seems, and maybe it's him as goes wanderin' around, as crazy as a loon, and a-scarin' an' frightenin' of honest folks with his laughin' and such."

"It's the owl that does that, sir," said Dick. "He didn't write in the Bible, I don't suppose."

"Very likely the madman may be found in the caverns," said Clifford. "He claims to have found the secret of the treasure, and without doubt he visits the place often."

"He certainly has not been in the house for some time," replied Dick, "for I found no traces of any one, and the dust was an inch thick on the table in the inner room, and as for the Bible, it looked as if it had not been disturbed for years."

"Maybe there was no crazy man at all," suggested Mr. Wattles, "and we only thought there was, 'cause we heard the owl screechin'. I reckon the man what wrote in the book is dead long ago, and they ain't nobody on the island 'cept ourselves."

"That's about the way I work it, Mr. Wattles," said Ben Bluff. "They ain't no crazy pusson on the island, 'less it's the Dutchman or that red-headed cook of ourn."

There was a laugh at this, and then Dick broke in with:

"But who could have fired that shot, Uncle Ben? There was no imagination about that."

"Of course there's a crazy man on the island," interjected Clifford. "Indeed, I may say that I saw him this very morning."

"You did?" ejaculated several of the party.

"What was he like?" asked Jack.

"He was tall and thin, with a quantity of hair on his body, which was nearly naked," answered Clifford, glibly, "and he carried a huge club in his hand. He was at some distance from me, and I caught only a mere glimpse of him, and was so surprised that I did not think of following him until he had disappeared."

"Where did he go?" asked Ben Bluff.

"He disappeared in the grove at the foot of the cliff."

"Then he must have gone to the cave," said Jack. "We ought to search for him, for when we find him we shall find the treasure as well."

"Yes!" thought Clifford, "and if you do go to the cave I will make certain that you never leave it alive."

CHAPTER XVIII

A MOST REMARKABLE ADVENTURE.

Dick, Jack and Clifford were anxious to find the secret caves and explore them in search of the hidden treasure that very afternoon, but Ben Bluff interposed an objection.

"It's Sunday," he said, "and I won't have any going arter pirate's gold and di'monds on such a day. We've had enough scurryin' around for one day, and I don't want no more."

"But, Uncle Ben," began Dick, "I don't see what particular—"

"Them's my orders, young feller!" roared the skipper, getting red in the face, "and there ain't goin' to be no goin' agin 'em, so keep quiet or I'll put ye in irons."

"Very well, then," said Dick, and, leaving the table, he beckoned to Ida Waters, and the two strolled down to the water where they examined the horizon in search of a sail.

Jack and Kitty went off in the opposite direction, while Clifford, rolling himself a cigarette, sat on the porch and idly smoked, addressing an occasional remark to the mate, who took up a position near him.

"This here reminds me," presently remarked Mr. Wattles, who was given to telling remarkable stories on occasion, "of something what happened to me once when I was a young

feller, an' was on my fust v'yage in the bark Lyddy Maria, out o' Boston."

"Being cast away upon an unknown island, you mean, of course?" said Clifford.

"Wall, no; not exactly that, 'cause we wasn't cast away, and the place was knowed well enough, but this here wild man business and snakes and all that."

"You would not mind telling it, I suppose?" said Clifford, who had his reasons for keeping alive the discussion concerning and the belief in the madman of the island.

"Why, I'd like nuthin better'n tellin' ye the story," muttered the mate, filling and lighting his pipe. "It was the bark Lyddy Maria as I told ye, and we was bound from Boston to Rio, but, meetin' a storm and bein' a bit shook up, we put in at the West Injy Islands to straighten things."

Brophy and Snitz appeared on the scene at this moment, and perceiving that a story was being told, sat down on the grass to listen.

Brophy smoked a short clay pipe, while Yacob cut a square inch of tobacco from the plug, put it in his mouth and began chewing on it in a most vigorous fashion.

"Wall, as I said, we was struck by a gale o' wind," continued the mate, "and got pretty well shook up, an' three of our sticks being tore out, the bowsprit broke clean off, and the rudder post pulled out of the socket, but we managed to get up a trysail, and stood for the nearest port."

Black Joe, who had been to the spring for water, now joined the group, placing his pail on the platform before the door and standing with his hands on his hip listening.

"Well, we managed to reach one of the islands in a day or so, and put in for repairs."

"Begorry, yez needed thim," said Brophy, "wid all yer masts gon' and the bowsprit and rudder done away wid. It's a wonder how yer iver rached land at all."

"Wall, we did," grumbled Mr. Wattles, "and don't you go to stickin' in your jaw agin, fur I won't have it. Wall, as I said, we reached the island and began to fix up a bit."

"There wasn't much for me to do, and I got leave to go ashore and have a run around, the old man tellin' me to be sure and come back by evenin', for he expected to sail by the time the moon came up."

"Off I sot, and, not carin' much fur the town, I struck out into the country and tramped about forty miles afore I begun to think about gettin' back to the wessel."

"They wasn't more'n an hour or so left to the time I was to get back, and I knowed I'd have to hustle, but just as I started, up there riz out o' the ground a great, hairy man nine foot high, with a club twice as big as himself in his fist, and made a grab at me."

"I got so scared that I up and run with all my might, but I never looked which way I was going, and, 'stead o' takin' the road back to the bark, I ran just t'other way, and never noticed it till I'd gone twenty miles, and run clean slap up again the side of a mountain what I knowed I hadn't seen afore."

"Wall, I was so astonished that I just stood there for ten minutes in surprise, when the big man came up and grabbed hold of me, stickin' me in his pocket like I was a plug o' ter-backer, and rushin' up the mountain with me."

"He took steps forty foot long, and went up like greased lightning, for, if he wasn't much on the level, he could beat the pigs at climbin' hills, you'd better believe."

"We got to the top of that there mountain, about ten miles high, in about five minutes, for the big man was a clipper for climbing, he was, and then he sot down on a big, flat rock at the top of the hill, took me out of his pocket, sat me down alongside him, and went to winkin' at me most awful."

"I could see that the sun was most down, and I knowed that if I meant to get back to the old bark afore she sailed, I'd have to stir my stumps putty lively."

"Begorry, I think yez would," muttered Brophy. "A comet wouldn't take ye there too soon."

Yacob was chewing away at his plug, but his eyes were very much larger than when the story began, and seemed in danger of popping out of their sockets.

"Wall, the big feller he grinned at me, and then took out a knife about four foot long from the very pocket I had been in myself, opened the big blade, and begun sharpening it on his boot."

"I thought what a fool I was not to have knowed the knife was there, for I might have stuck him with it just as well as not when we were running up hill."

"Wall, when he had got the knife sharp enough, and had tried it on one o' the hairs of his beard and split it clean in two at the fust slash, and it was at least an inch thick, he looked at me agin and grinned most turrible."

"Then he took a handkercher out of his pocket, about twenty foot square and as thick as sail cloth, spread it out on the rock and chucked me in the middle of it."

"I noticed that there was a tear in one corner of it and another in the other one, catecornerywise, but I never guessed how it was going to serve me just then, for I was most scared to death."

"The sun was most down, but it shone in my eyes as I lay on my back, and I snoze most terrific, giving the man such a scare that he jumped back thirty foot."

"I jumped up, but got my heel fast in the tear in the corner of the handkacher and rushed forward just as I felt a puff o' wind come down from t'other side of the island."

"Wall, the sun had went down, and I knowed that something had to be done putty sudden if I wanted to catch the bark afore she sailed; so I jumped up, caught t'other hole in the handkacher, stuck my head through and giye another jump jist as it began to blow a living gale."

"Well, sir, that handkacher just swelled out and made the puttiest sail ye ever see, and away I went afore the wind, fairly kitin' and dropped on the deck of the old bark just as she was leaving the harbor."

At the conclusion of this wonderful tale Snitz swallowed his quid, choked and made a terrible time, Brophy slapped him on the back, while Joe, jumping aside to escape the Irishman's fist, fell into the pail of water, upset it, and rolled across the platform.

Honora, hearing the disturbance, came running out, broom in hand, and began to belabor all hands, sparing none, but giving every one a buffet.

Clifford escaped in one direction and Mr. Wattles in another, and at last poor Yacob, having caught his breath, straightened up, shook himself, and muttered:

"Py chiminies, off you told some more big lies like dot already, I should die once."

"I believe yez," said Brophy, dodging a blow from Honora's broom. "They're too strong for yez, intirely!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE VERGE OF DISCOVERY.

Several days passed before Ben Bluff would consent to the exploration of the treasure caves, there being considerable work to do on the piers, the stockade, and other improvements which had been projected.

"What's the good o' this money to us, anyway, Billy Wattles?" he said to the mate one evening, as they all sat around the table in the principal room in the cottage. "We can't spend it here, and we can't take it away with us."

"Some day we might do that, sir," answered Mr. Wattles.

"As how, Mr. Wattles? We ain't got a ship, and I don't see much chance o' makin' one on this island. We might build a boat, but a boat ain't going to be big enough to take away all that treasure, and I wouldn't be bothered carryin' off a little bit and leavin' the biggest part behind."

"Couldn't we come back for it, cap'n?" suggested the mate.

"Yes, we might, if we knowed where to come; but we don't even know which way to go to get away from this here blessed island. Nobody knows whether we're in the Canaries or the Bermudas, or where we is, or if we ain't somewhere in the Pacific. We're lost, that's what we are."

"I don't think it's as bad as that, Uncle Ben," said Dick; "and I think I can locate our present whereabouts."

"You do, hey, you young upstart?" roared the skipper. "teachin' yer elders their business, are ye? Well, you've got more cheek nor a little. I don't know where we are, and what business are you got tellin' us the place?"

"Perhaps he does know," said Ida Waters, coalingly; "and anyhow, it won't do any harm for him to tell us what he thinks. He can't prove it, you know."

"Well, go on, you young scamp," growled the skipper, "and give an old salt a lesson in navigation, but if ye don't make out a clear case I'll put ye in irons, just bear that in mind."

Dick cleared the table, took a piece of white clay and marked out a rough chart of the lower Atlantic coast of the United States to start with.

"Here is where we sailed," he began, making a round mark, "and our course was about south-south-east. Then the gale caught us and drove us ahead for more than two days. By that time we were, say, well below Hatteras. Then we drifted, being outside of the gulf stream, and on the fourth day a cyclone from the south-west struck us and we headed to the wind and drifted against it with the current down among the West India Islands."

"Well, and what then?" asked the mate. "That much looks clear enough."

"Does it?" grunted Ben Bluff. "Cuba and Domingo and them is such little islands that we wouldn't be likely to see 'em, hey?"

"My opinion is," said Dick, drawing a line on his extemporized chart, "that we drifted through the windward passage between Cuba and Hayti in the darkness, and you know how black it was, and that then some current bore us to the eastward past Jamaica, and that then the wind changing, we were driven upon this island, which lies, I should think, off the coast of Venezuela, just about here," and Dick made a small circle to indicate the island.

"H'm!" muttered Ben Bluff, not looking at the chart, "there is islands off the coast of Venzuely, there's Curcoa and Marjarita and Tortuga and Buen Ayre, and there's others, but it is a good four hundred miles acrost the Caribee ocean to any one on 'em, and do you mean to tell me we could drift that fur in the time we had?"

"Wall, I don't know about that, sir," said the mate. "I've heerd tell o' some wonderful driftin' myself, and I was in a ship once what——"

"Never mind any of your yawns, Billy Wattles," interrupted Ben Bluff, with a grunt and a growl. "We never know where yer a-goin' ter fetch up when ye get spinnin' them sea-tales o' your'n. There ain't no end on 'em," and the skipper gave a hitch and a spring which brought him on his feet, and then stumped out of the house.

Dick and Ida Waters followed; Jack and Kitty sat in a corner by themselves, and the mate and Clifford entered into a discussion of the situation over in another corner.

Brophy and Snitz went outside to have a quiet smoke, and after an interval Honora entered the room.

"Look at the muss they've been makin' on the table," she muttered, "and supper most ready. Faix, I niver saw such

untidy vilyans," and with a damp cloth the tidy stewardess erased the chart which Dick had been at such pains to make.

"I dunno but what he's right," said the mate at that moment, arising from his seat, "and the island ought to be accordin' to his reckonin'——"

And here he broke off short.

"What's the matter with yez?" asked Honora.

"Where's the chart?"

"Sure, I saw none."

"It was marked on the table with a lump o' chalk."

"Faix, thin, it's rubbed out. Av yez want to make charts, don't go dirtyin' up me clane tables wid 'em."

"H'm! Ye blunderin' Irish lunatic," growled the mate, "that there chart give the position of this here island, and now you've went and——"

"What!" cried the skipper, who came stumping back into the room at this moment, "has that there stupid Irish girl rubbed it out?"

"That's just what she have, sir."

"H'm! And I was just making up my mind that Dick was right, and was comin' in to locate his island. I know the hull of that South American coast."

"That for yer chairts and yer chalk marks and all yer musses," snapped the incorrigible Irish girl, snapping her fingers. "Nobody knows where we are, and it wouldn't do thim any good av they did," and Honora went away to her own quarters in triumph.

Dick could not fix the matter in his mind after that, and all his succeeding attempts at chart making only resulted in failures.

"It's a great pity I didn't see the fust one," sighed the skipper. "I reckon I could ha' located the island from the mark that Dick made, but now there ain't no guessin' it. Reckon now we must be in the Canaries arter all."

"Then where's the peak of Teneriffy?" asked Mr. Wattles.

"I dunno, I'm sure, Billy," answered Ben Bluff, dejectedly. "Maybe it's been blowed down just to bother us."

Two days after this the skipper gave his consent to the exploration of the caves, and Mr. Wattles, Dick, Jack, Clifford, and Brophy set out on the expedition, being supplied with ropes, torches, and other things needed, the skipper and the rest of the crew remaining behind.

"One-legged men is no good in a place like that," declared the skipper, "and this thing can go on without me. I've had one experience at the cave, and I don't want another."

The explorers took the path along shore, ascended the cliffs, and at last stood before the iron ring set in the rock, where the skipper had formerly been so alarmed by the serpents.

None were seen now, and Brophy, who was provided with a short iron bar, inserted it in the ring, which he and Mr. Wattles then turned toward the east.

The movement caused the large slab of stone to revolve, leaving an opening a foot square on one side of the slab which contained the iron ring.

The latter stone could now be pushed aside with little difficulty, and an opening three feet square was made, showing a flight of stone steps leading below.

"Here we are!" cried Dick, lighting a torch, "and now to explore the pirates' treasure house!"

CHAPTER XX.

IN SEARCH OF TREASURE.

Mr. Wattles led the way down the steps, followed by Dick, Jack and Clifford, in the order named, the little Irishman bringing up the rear.

The steps went straight down till twenty-four had been passed, and then they took a sharp turn to the right and wound in a spiral for eight or ten more, when they continued in a straight line again in the same direction as the first section.

At the end of a dozen steps a platform was reached, and here three or four passages led off in as many directions at the end of a few yards.

"Here's a flight o' steps, and good ones; reckon we'd better take these," said the mate, entering a passage on the left and descending a flight of well made stone steps.

He had not descended more than seven or eight of them, however, when Dick, who was close behind him, with a torch, cried, excitedly:

"Come back; come back; don't you see that we are going down the green steps? No one knows how soon they may end and we will go plunging down into the abyss."

Those behind hurried back, and Mr. Wattles, pausing, looked around and said:

"You're right, Dick; the walls and steps are as green as grass. Wonder what makes it?"

"Mold, I suppose," said Dick. "It's a mercy that I noticed the color in time and remembered what the paper said about them."

"What did it say?" asked the mate.

"To beware of the green stairs which end in nothing."

"Oh, that only means that we will find nothing after we get to the bottom," observed Clifford, with a slight sneer. "I don't suppose there is any real danger in going down. Suppose we follow them and see what really is at the bottom?"

"I don't see no use in that if there ain't nothin' there," returned the mate. "Come on. We don't want to lose no time."

The party retraced its steps and entered a passage on the right, Clifford hanging back unobserved.

When the last man had entered he stole back to the green stairs, and cautiously descended a dozen of them, when he paused, struck a match, lighted a small bull's-eye lantern which he took from his pocket and threw the light below him.

"The steps seem all right so far," he mused, as he began slowly descending, feeling his way with the utmost caution.

At the end of five or six more steps he paused, throwing the light downwards and directly in front of him.

The steps had taken a turn at this point, and at a point a yard or two in advance, the light did not make a bright spot on the wall, but seemed to go on and on until it was lost.

Clifford took another step and held the light close to the stone.

At this point the steps took a sharp turn, and then suddenly ended at the verge of a precipice, the height of which could not be determined, as the light of the lantern failed to penetrate to the bottom.

"Good!" muttered Clifford, as he retraced his steps. "Once let me lure Jack Port to this spot and his life won't be worth a rush. I'm glad Dick made this discovery, for no one puts much faith in what that rattle-head says, and it will be easy enough to make Jack think that the treasure is down there."

Reaching the top of the flight, the man extinguished and secreted his lantern, entered the right-hand passage and soon caught up with the rest of the party, who stood at the entrance of a chamber whose walls were blood red.

"This one is red," said Dick, at that moment, "and the blue one is the one where the treasure is."

"And that is the lowest of all; so the record in the fly-leaf says," answered Clifford. "We must find another flight of steps somewhere."

"I see wan beyant," said Brophy, entering the red chamber. "Suppose we follow it. Oh, murther! phwat is that?"

The man, torch in hand, had taken only a few steps, when he tripped on some obstruction and let fall his torch, which, as soon as it reached the floor, went out.

"Don't pick it up!" cried Dick, in alarm, dashing forward and seizing Brophy.

"Why not, then?" asked the man.

"Because the air of this place is death," cried Dick. "Look!" and he held the end of his own torch to the ground, where the flame was extinguished as suddenly as though it had been plunged in water.

"The place is full of deadly gases, which at this point lie close to the ground, but which, as you advance and descend lower, fill up the cave. This is the death chamber against which we were warned."

"Another thing worth knowing," mused Clifford. "If one plan does not carry, the other may."

"Troth, I think ye are a wise young man," said Brophy, as they retreated from the red cave. "Yez do remember everything. I wondher howiver we reach the blue cave, anyhow?"

"Here's another passage," said Mr. Wattles, when they had traversed the main corridor a few yards. "Maybe this is the one we ought to take."

He pointed to an arched passage, very little higher than his head, leading down a gradual incline and turning at a distance of ten or twelve feet.

Jack Port, who carried a coil of rope slung over one shoulder, and across his chest, advanced a few steps, held up his torch and said:

"This looks more like it than any other we have yet tried. Suppose we follow it."

He led the way, the others following, turning every three or four yards, and still going down, not step by step, but by a gradual incline.

They had turned fully a dozen times, when they came upon a level platform, eight or ten feet in length, at the end of which was a flight of three wide stone steps.

At the bottom of these was an archway, over which was a whitened skull fastened to the wall by a huge spike driven into the forehead.

The archway was barely wide enough for one person to pass through, and just the height of an ordinary sized man, the sides being formed of rough, jagged crystals, which emitted a blue glitter in the light of the torches.

"The blue cave!" cried Dick. "This is the treasure room at last."

The passage was about six feet in length and led to a room twenty feet square, the walls and ceiling of which, and even the floor, were formed of the same blue crystals which were seen at the entrance.

As the party entered, a fluttering of wings was heard, and a number of bats began flying wildly about, uttering shrill cries and emitting a sickening stench when they approached too closely.

Dick knocked down a score of them, while Brophy uttered a startled cry and exclaimed:

"Be the mimory av St. Patrick, this must be the place where all the toads and snakes wor sint whin they wor druv out av Ierland. The place is full av thim."

Jack Port uttered an exclamation of disgust as he kicked a great, fat, dull-eyed toad out of his path, and slimy snakes and quick-moving lizards darted away on every side.

A heap of skulls and bones could be seen in one corner; not far away and placed close against the opposite wall were half a score of big iron-bound chests, covered with dust and festooned with thick webs, woven by fat, evil-looking spiders, who ran into their holes as the light of the torches fell upon them.

"The saints protect us!" muttered the Irishman. "I wouldn't touch a penny av the treasure if it's to be taken away from undher the jaws av such reptiles, the deadly vilyans. The look av thim is enough to poison ye."

CHAPTER XXI.

DOWN THE GREEN STAIRS.

"Nonsense, man, don't be afraid of a few spiders," said Dick, striking his torch in front of one of the chests and destroying in a moment the work of many long, patient months.

The webs caught fire and blazed up like so much tow, while the spiders scurried away into dark corners, the bats darted away screaming, and the snakes hissed and squirmed away, finding a refuge among the skulls and bones tossed carelessly on the floor.

"It ain't a very nice place," muttered the mate, "but gold is gold an' di'mon's is di'mon's, no matter where ye find 'em. Try if ye can bust open one o' them chists with the crowbar, Jim."

"It's not me that'll touch a finger to it," answered the Irishman. "I'm not afeared av pirates or lions or tigers, but thim snakes an' toads an' spidhers has a curse an thim, an' I'll not go near thim."

"Here, give me the bar, you chattering idiot," cried Clifford, snatching it from Brophy's hand. "Hold your torch closer, Dick. There, that's it."

There was a sort of iron strap around one of the chests, and Clifford inserted the bar between this and the chest itself, and pried vigorously, snapping the iron band in two.

In another moment he had pried open the lid of the chest and had thrown it back, disclosing a mass of gold coin, jewels and gold plate thrown loosely into the chest, and half filling it.

"There, that's a good start," he exclaimed, taking out half a dozen gold pieces and putting them in his pocket. "This chest alone ought to make us all rich, and there are ten of them in all."

At that moment a wild cry was heard from Brophy, who was seen staring fixedly at the pile of skulls on the floor.

"Oh, murther! Look at that!" he gasped.

They all turned and saw, coming from the pile, the head of an immense serpent with glistening eyes and swiftly darting tongue, glancing this way and that as it turned its head and hissing in an angry fashion.

More and more of its body appeared, and, as it finally freed itself and glided toward the intruders, two more, as large, if not larger, came from the same uncanny hiding place.

"Down with 'em!" cried Dick, striking the first monster on the head with his torch.

Clifford fired a shot from his pistol at the second, and Jack struck down the third and trod on its venomous head with his heel as it lay writhing and hissing on the floor.

The blue crystals began to emit a ghastly light, and to send out thick vapors as the python's mangled head struck them, as though the poison it contained had created a chemical change, the crystals being formed largely of copper, which is most easily affected by acids.

The sight alarmed Brophy, and he fled in terror; Jack, although he could guess the explanation of the phenomenon, being greatly startled.

Although the first of the monsters had been dispatched, there were others, for, as Brophy in his mad haste tripped and fell over the pile of skulls, six more of the terrible creatures appeared and rushed, hissing and writhing, upon their common enemy.

"Better retreat, boys," cried the mate. "The torches is most give out, and there's too many of these critters."

There was a scramble for the opening, and they rushed out one at a time and hurried up the steps and up the incline leading to the main passage.

Brophy was first, then the mate and Dick, Jack Port next, and Clifford last.

When at the top of the spiral path Jack Port stumbled and dropped his torch as Clifford suddenly exclaimed:

"Look out! Here's two of the horrible creatures right behind us!"

Jack's torch went out, and as he scrambled to his feet Clifford said:

"This way, Jack, this way; I know the way out."

The others were considerably in advance, and Clifford, with an evil light in his eyes, hurried Jack toward the left-hand opening in the passage, and which led to the green stairway.

"This way!" he hissed, dashing his torch to the floor as he espied the opening into which he hurried Jack, the other being powerless to resist.

"Stop! Where are we going? This is not right—we are going down again!" cried Jack, as he stumbled down three or four steps.

"It's where I want you to go—where you'll never trouble me again, Jack Port!" hissed Clifford. "This is not the first time I have tried to put you out of the way of troubling me, but it will be the last, for now I shall succeed."

"My God! What would you do?" gasped Jack, trying in vain to hold back. "What place is this where you are sending me?"

"Down the green stairs, which end in nothing—which end in death!" hissed Clifford, as he suddenly hurled himself upon his rival.

Jack plunged forward, uttered a wild cry and felt himself falling into space.

The cry was repeated, there was a rush of air, a heavy body went plunging downward, and then, at the end of several seconds, a faint sound as of a weight falling into a body of water.

Clifford lighted his lantern in feverish haste, shot its rays down into the darkness, and hissed:

"Lie there, you miserable upstart and pretender, lie there and rot, for you will never trouble me again. I failed when I tried to throw the boulder on you going down the mountain. You escaped when I locked you in the cabin of the yacht, the bullet went wide of its mark when I set the trap for you at the old stone house and frightened you all by the story of the supposed madman, but this time I have not failed."

"Hallo, Clifford! Jack, where are you?" cried the voice of Dick in the passage outside.

Clifford's lantern was extinguished in an instant.

"Ahoy! Is that you, Dick?" he cried, hurrying up the steps.

"Yes; where are you?"

Clifford reached the passage as he saw the light of Dick's torch enter the red chamber.

"Here I am!" he cried; "but I can't find Jack. Have you seen him?"

"No: but I found his torch. He fell, and it went out when those monstrous serpents rushed upon us. We were both in darkness, and I am afraid—you have not really seen him; you are not joking with me?"

"Joking?" cried Dick. "No, indeed. What is it that you are afraid of?"

"That Jack has lost his way and perished in the death chamber. The air there is fatal. Have you looked?"

"Yes; and I can see no trace of him."

"Let us look again," whispered Clifford, a dreadful thought entering his brain. "We may yet save him. We must not let him die without trying to save him."

At that moment the mate came hurrying down the steps leading to the cliff.

"Have you found them?" asked Mr. Wattles.

"Clifford, but not Jack. I am afraid that he has fallen down the pit at the end of the green stairs."

"The pit," repeated the mate. "Who said there was a pit?"

"There must be!" cried Dick. "Ha! This is the opening; follow me."

"Take care, my lad; you mustn't go down there," cried the mate, warningly.

At that moment Brophy came hurrying out of the passage.

"Misther Jack has gone down the green stairs," he cried. "I found his hat at the place where they break off."

"Down the green stairs!" cried Dick. "Then he is lost, lost!"

"Yes," thought Clifford, "and now the prize is mine."

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK'S SUSPICIONS VERIFIED.

The exploring party returned to the house with sad hearts, the appalling accident to Jack Port being the one theme of conversation.

Kitty saw them coming, and ran to meet them, supposing, of course, that Jack was with them, but discovering his absence as soon as she reached the party.

"Where is Jack?" she asked at once, addressing Dick.

"Don't ask me, Kitty," the young fellow sobbed.

"You won't see him no more, miss," said Mr. Wattles. "Something terrible has happened."

"Dead!" gasped Kitty, turning pale and falling half-conscious into Dick's arms.

"I fear so," said Dick; "but do not be disheartened. We may find him yet. He fell down a precipice, and we could not see him; but he may be alive for all that. We will procure ropes and search for him."

"No, no; he is dead, and you are only deceiving me so that it will be the easier for me to bear it," sobbed Kitty. "Oh, my poor Jack, my poor Jack, and I loved you so!"

Her grief filled Clifford with jealous rage, for he felt that her love for the dead man would be a continual barrier to the love which he hoped to inspire in her for himself, and that she would never consent to let another take the place which Jack would have taken had he lived.

"I'll win her yet in spite of all," he murmured. "She shall, she must be my wife, come what may. I have not toiled and schemed to be cheated in the end, when I have succeeded in removing my rival, and I am determined that she shall be mine."

By degrees the young girl grew calmer and made Dick tell her how Jack had lost his life.

Dick could not supply all the details, but Clifford had prepared a plausible story which he related, stopping now and then as though so deeply affected that he could not proceed, and seeming to be overcome with grief at the loss of his companion, whom he repeatedly alluded to as his best friend, the dearest fellow on earth, the closest chum he ever had, and by other tender epithets.

"If he was such a good friend to you, it was your duty to keep closer to him and prevent this awful accident," said Kitty, who distrusted the man, without knowing why she did so.

"That reproach will go with me to the grave, Miss Waters," replied the arch hypocrite. "I know I did wrong in not keeping nearer the poor fellow, but the place was so strange to me, and——"

"Never mind, Mr. Clifford," said the good-hearted mate, who lacked the perception of his companions, "you did all you could, and Miss Kitty will tell you so one of these days when she gets over this thing a little, my lad."

Kitty said no more, but walked back to the cottage with Dick, Clifford being left to himself.

"I wonder if everything was as he said it happened?" mused Dick, who until now had never harbored a suspicion of the man. "He was always attentive to Kitty, but I never knew he loved her, or had said anything to her. If he had, there might be a reason for—— No, I cannot think him such a villain as

that, and yet, well, I don't see why he need go on the way he did. He and Jack were never such sworn friends as he made out. There was a little too much of that, as though he were trying to make Kitty think more of him for being such a good friend to Jack."

There was no time to follow out this line of reasoning, however, as they soon arrived at the house, where dinner was awaiting them, and the sad story had to be repeated to the captain and to Ida, who did all she could to comfort her broken-hearted sister.

When Ben Bluff heard what had happened, he brushed away a tear which ran down his bronzed cheek and muttered:

"It's all my fault for letting him go. If I'd 've stuck to my fust notions this wouldn't ha' happened. There never was any luck in them pirates' caves, and the money what you do find there brings no good with it. That's the last time that any one goes to that place. There's bad luck in it, and we don't want no more lives lost in the wicked place."

The more Dick thought over the matter the more he was convinced that Clifford was in some way connected with his brother's death, and he determined to settle the question one way or the other, and either prove the man innocent, or confront him with the full evidence of his guilt.

He said nothing concerning his intentions, but shortly after dark that evening he quietly left the house, having made his preparations during the afternoon for a further exploration of the cave.

"We all accepted the theory of poor Jack's death too suddenly," he mused, "and made no attempt to discover if he might not perhaps be still alive, and if I find that the poor fellow might have been saved, I shall never cease to blame myself for not having gone sooner to his assistance."

He left the house very quietly, so as not to attract attention, and he had already passed through the grove and was well on his way to the foot of the cliff, congratulating himself upon having escaped without being seen, when he heard his own name pronounced in a whisper from a little clump of trees on the left.

"St! Masther Dick Is it ye that it is?"

"Yes; is that you, Jim?" asked Dick, in a low tone, as he hurried forward. "What are you doing out here?"

"Nothing at all, Masther Dick; the same as you. There'll be no harm in goin' wid yez, I suppose?"

"Did Uncle Ben send you out here to spy upon me?" asked Dick, suddenly.

"Indeed he did not," answered Brophy, with great promptness. "I've had, strange notions, Masther Dick, and I'd go crazy if I didn't tell them to somebody. I do believe I'm haunted."

"Nonsense, Jim," said Dick, as the two walked along mechanically. "What makes you say that?"

"I do be hearing Masther Jack's voice all the time, the same as I h'ard it in the cave at the bottom av thim accursed stairs."

"You heard Jack's voice at the foot of the stairs?" cried Dick, seizing Brophy by the arm.

"I did; and I was that frightened that I nearly pitched over into the pit where he was himself."

"This was after you had found his hat at the bottom of the steps?"

"It was."

"What did he say, Jim?"

"He called out to me from the bottom av that awful pit to come an' save him, and thin he laughed and cried, and took on so dreadful that I thought it wor his ghost trying to lead me on, and I rin away from the place as fasht as I could go."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" demanded Dick, angrily. "We might have saved Jack's life."

"No fear av it, me boy," answered the other, earnestly. "Yer brother is dead, dead beyond recovery, Masther Dick, and thim

wor only ghosts and spirits that were trying to draw me over the brink av the preshipish so that the poor bye might not be lonely on his journey to Purgatory, Heaven rest him, but it's not Jim Brophy as wud be a fit companion to um, the fine, brave lad he was, and so I got frightened and run away."

"I tell you, Brophy, that was Jack's own voice you heard, and not a spirit. The place is not as deep as we thought, and he was lying, crushed and bleeding—dying, perhaps—and we left him to his fate. Why didn't you tell me this before, man?" and Dick seized Brophy's arm with a grip that made him wince.

"Aisy, aisy, Masther Dick; don't be crushing me bones intirely!" cried Brophy. "Sure, how could I suppose the poor bye wud be alive afther falling down a place there was no ind to? It wasn't reasonable at all."

"Stop!" cried Dick, after hurrying on for several rods. "Did he say anything else; mention any of our party?"

"He did that," said the other; "he spoke the name av Clifford, and said the man had him pushed over, but I hardly believed it, he said so many wild things."

"Then I do believe it!" cried Dick, "for it is the truth. Robert Clifford is a murderer, in heart, if not in deed. I know it, I feel it, and now I have the proofs!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE PIT.

When Jack Port felt himself falling into the abyss at the foot of the green stairs, a startled cry arose to his lips, for he thought that death was close at hand.

Everything that had happened to him in all his life seemed to pass before him in those few swift seconds, and the events of years were lived over again in a tenth as many moments.

A second cry broke from his lips as he felt himself suddenly arrested in his mad flight, and found that he was swinging from some fixed point above his head.

He threw up his hands and grasped a hard substance like a rock, and clutched it with a despairing grip.

It was a projecting ledge in the wall of the chasm down which he had fallen, and might yet be the means of saving his life.

The coil of rope over his shoulder had caught upon this and had sustained him long enough to enable him to grasp it with both hands, slipping off a moment later as he drew himself up out of the abyss and rested upon the ledge.

Then he saw a flash of light through the darkness, and heard the voice of Clifford uttering words of triumph.

In an instant he realized that the man had long sought his life, and had attempted it upon more than one occasion, and had at last, as he believed, succeeded.

The truth, bursting upon him so suddenly, was more than his overstrained nerves could bear, and his consciousness left him.

Some time later, how long he knew not, he heard some one calling him, and he shouted back:

"I am here, down the chasm. Save me if you can. Clifford hurled me down, that he might— Save me, save me; ha, ha! in the chasm, at the foot of the green stairs, ha, ha, ha, ha!" and a wild laugh succeeded his appeal for help, and then all was darkness and oblivion.

It was this cry that had so frightened Brophy, and had caused him to think that ghosts and hobgoblins were trying to lure him to his death, and he fled in terror.

When Jack again roused himself all was still in the cavern, and for a few moments he could not remember where he was, until, in attempting to rise, his foot dislodged a loose stone

and sent it rushing through space, a distant splash a few seconds later telling that it had fallen into the water.

He remembered then where he was, and drops of cold sweat stood upon his forehead as he realized his peril.

He reached out cautiously, first with one hand, and then the other, and discovered that the ledge upon which he rested was about three feet in width and projected twice that distance from the wall of rock.

By degrees his strength increased, and he felt in his pocket for some matches, lighting three or four at once and looking around him while the light lasted.

Far above his head he could see the broken stairway, the green rocks shining in the light of the matches.

He let his light fall, and watched them as they went hurrying down, going out before they reached the water.

Cutting off a foot or two from his coil of rope, he unlaid the strands, pulled the yarns apart, and lighted the tow with a match, being thus provided with a very serviceable torch.

With this he examined the ledge and the wall above and around him, and then, making a large bunch of raveled yarns from his foot of rope, he allowed the entire mass to blaze up, and then cast it from him into the abyss.

It went whirling downward, lighting up the gloom of this awful space, and fell hissing into a lake of water at the bottom, remaining alight for several seconds, till at last it went out, and he was again in darkness.

"There is no use trying to get back to the green stairs again," he mused, "and Clifford has doubtless reported that I am dead, and there will be no search made for me. The only way of escape is by trying to reach the bottom of the pit, and even then I may not succeed in finding a way out."

He waited for some time in the hope that some of his companions might return, but at the end of two hours, as he judged it to be, hearing nothing, he determined to make the effort to reach the bottom of the pit.

Uncoiling the rope, he found that he had fully one hundred feet of it, which would enable him to descend to some lower ledge, if there were any, and thence to some other until he reached the bottom.

"If there are no ledges large enough to stand on," he mused, "the rope will take me a hundred feet nearer to the water, and I can drop into it."

Making another torch he let it fall, and ascertained that there was a ledge somewhat larger than that on which he rested, forty or fifty feet below him, but considerably to the right.

Doubling his rope, he passed the loop over the spur of the ledge, putting his coat under it to prevent its chaffing, and then, grasping both ropes firmly, began to descend, hand under hand, keeping the part of the ropes which were below him wrapped once around his right leg.

With an end of blazing rope in his teeth to show him the way, he descended till he reached the level of the lower ledge, having still four or five feet of rope to spare.

Swinging his body to the right and then to the left, he gradually increased the length of his swing till at last he sprang upon the ledge and loosened one end of the rope.

It rapidly paid out, and in a few moments the whole coil fell about him and hung over the brink.

The light showed him that there was another ledge, barely large enough to stand upon, at a considerable distance below, probably fully one hundred feet down.

Making a loop in the end of the rope, he secured it to a spur of rock rising from the ledge, drew it tight, and once more lowered himself into the abyss.

"Down, down, down he went into the darkness, the walls of the pit closing in about him till he seemed to be in a shaft of a mine; down, down, down, till the end of the rope was reached, and the ledge was still beneath him.

Glancing below him, he saw that he would have to drop at least six feet, with the chance of being unable to maintain his hold upon the ledge, and a fall of unknown height beneath him.

He was about to release his hold, having decided to make the attempt, when there came a sudden startling sound from above, and rope, support and all were released, and Jack was suddenly swung out into space and then hurled downward.

He struck the water with a splash that sent the spray flying far up into the shaft, and then sank far below the surface, his feet striking a sandy bottom two fathoms or more below the surface.

When he arose he rested for a few moments, and then, being unable to see anything, swam slowly forward, until his hands touched a wall of rock.

He followed this along for a considerable distance, and was beginning to fear that there was no outlet large enough to admit of his passing when he felt a cold current strike his knees.

Folding his arms he sank below the surface until he felt the colder water on his face, when, feeling up and down the wall with his hands, he found an opening three feet wide through which the colder water entered.

Here was a passage to the sea, no doubt, and rising to the surface, he filled his lungs with air, and then, diving, entered the passage, and struck out boldly and vigorously.

The current was against him, and he did not know how long the passage through the cliff might be, but it was his only chance of escape, and he determined to make the most of it.

The passage was barely wide enough to swim in, but Jack pushed on, now and then sending himself forward by a vigorous shove against the rock with his feet, which saved his arms.

On and on he swam, but still the passage was filled with water, and even grew narrower as he advanced, till at last he had barely room to pass even with his arms at his side.

His head was beginning to swim, and he saw strange lights dancing before his eyes, and felt that he was drowning when, all of a sudden, he shot out into the open air, and in a few moments felt his feet strike against the stones on the bottom.

He looked up, saw the starlit sky above his head, and great black rocks all around him, and knew that he was in some secret nook at the base of the cliff which none of his companions had yet discovered.

Following the course of the current, which was caused by the rising tide, he presently passed around a great jagged rock and out into a little bay at the foot of the cliff, across which he swam till he reached the sands, where he sat down utterly exhausted.

"Who's that?" he suddenly heard a voice cry out of the darkness.

"Jack," he answered, and then there came an answering cry, like a great sob, and in another moment he was clasped in his brother's arms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEN BLUFF ENDS HIS LAST VOYAGE.

Jack's story was soon told, and then Dick related how his suspicions had been aroused, and how he and Brophy had set out to return to the cave and search for the missing man, when at the foot of the cliff they had come upon him.

"Then Clifford is responsible for all I have suffered," said Jack; "but there is still one mystery unsolved, and that concerns those mysterious shots which were fired at me from the old stone house in the woods."

"There is no mystery about that," said Dick. "Clifford fixed

a gun or pistol inside the house in such a way that when the door was pushed open the weapon would be discharged. He then made his way out by another door, which he took care to fasten securely, and then his trap was set. He probably went there just after our first visit, discovered the secret of that mysterious voice, and made his preparations, knowing that we would return. He it was, too, you may remember, who kept alive the notion that the old house was the home of a madman. He was constantly telling the men about it."

"I have escaped from all his snares," added Jack, after a pause; "but what is to be done with so persistent an enemy? It will lead to a duel to the death between us."

"No, not now," said Dick; "for we know him and can prepare ourselves."

"Faix, if I had my way," declared Brophy, "I'd take him back to thim green stairs and throw him down thim, takin' the precaution to put a bullet into his wicked brain in the first place, to make sure that he'd niver trouble us again."

"No, we can't do that," said Dick, "but we will find a way to make him powerless to harm us."

"Some one must prepare Kitty for the good news," said Jack. "She must not learn too suddenly that I am alive, for the reaction might kill her. Will you tell her, Dick?"

"Yes; but we are not near enough yet. She may be asleep by the time we reach the house, and if so I will not awaken her. Poor girl, she was thoroughly worn out when I went away, and I do not doubt that she is now quietly resting after the terrible shock she received."

The three friends proceeded on their way, when, just before reaching the house, the moon came up from behind the grove and shed its full radiance over the scene.

"Wait a minute," said Dick, pausing at the edge of the wood. "I will go ahead and see that the coast is clear."

At that instant a man sprang out from among the trees and confronted them.

It was Robert Clifford, his face pale and haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his limbs trembling.

Remorse had prayed upon him now that he thought his hour of triumph had come. Sleep was denied him, and for hours he had fought against the tortures of an awakened conscience until he was well-nigh mad.

He saw Jack standing in the moonlight, and the sight seemed to root him to the ground.

"Go back!" he hissed; "go back to the grave at the foot of the green stairway where I hurled you; go back to the pit and leave me in peace; go back to your grave, I say; go back!"

"Clifford," said Jack, advancing a step or two, "I am not dead, as you think me, but alive. Your schemes have failed, but do not think that I mean to take——"

"It is a lie, a lie, a lie!" screamed Clifford. "You are not alive; you are dead, dead, and I have killed you; I lied to you, led you to the fatal chamber, and hurled you to your death. You are dead, I say, dead. Go back to your grave, go back, and do not seek to drag me with you; go back; go back; you are dead!"

The man was clearly insane, for he raved and shrieked and made wild gestures, waving them back with his hands and exhibiting the greatest terror.

"Stop!" said Dick; "Jack is not dead, Clifford. He escaped death as by a miracle, and is still alive. You have——"

As Jack stepped forward, Clifford uttered a piercing shriek and fled toward the pier which Captain Ben had been constructing, and which was now completed.

"Stop him!" cried Dick, as the madman reached the pier. "He will kill himself if we do not prevent it!"

All three hurried after the frantic Clifford, but he reached the end of the pier in advance of them and plunged into the sea, disappearing from sight in an instant.

They waited for him to come up, thinking that it was his

intention to swim to another part of the island, fearing to remain near those who would be his natural enemies now that his crimes were known.

The next day, when the tide came in, his body was thrown upon the beach not far from the cliffs, a wound in the head showing that the plunge from the pier must have been fatal.

He had struck his head upon a rock on the bottom, had been rendered insensible, and had drowned, his body being carried out by the undercurrent, and afterward, when it came to the surface, cast upon the shore by the next tide.

His crimes had been most terribly punished, and a just retribution had fallen upon one who had misused his abilities, and had allowed hate and jealousy to rule him instead of trampling the base passions under his feet and striving to be a man.

Kitty Waters did not learn of Jack's escape until the next day, and not until several days, although she suspected that Clifford had sought Jack's life, did she know of the terrible end of the man.

None of the castaways ever again entered the cave where the treasure of Sanchez, the pirate, lay hidden, and it may be there to this day, for all that we know.

For a year longer Ben Bluff and his crew remained upon the island, and then, one bright morning, after a terrible storm at sea, a ship came into the bay and dropped anchor.

Ben Bluff himself ran up the signal flag from the pole at the shore end of the new pier.

A boat put off, and the skipper and five jolly tars came ashore.

"Welcome to this island, sir," said the skipper. "I am Cap'n Bluff, of the Sprite, wrecked on this coast over a year ago, but before you tell me who you are, have the goodness to tell me where you are, for I'm blessed if I know. I'm regularly lost."

"Wall, Cap'n Bluff," answered the other skipper, "I reckon you're on an island somewhere about seventy-five miles off the nor'west coast of Venezuela. I was druv out o' my course by last night's storm, or I reckon I wouldn't ha' been here myself."

"Then Dick was right arter all," said the skipper, with a grunt; "and I never give him credit for knowin' much. Reckon we must ha' come just the way he said, and here we stuck, just too far away from anywhere so's not to see nothing and no way o' findin' it out."

The party left the island that very day, things being left just as they were for the benefit of any shipwrecked sailors who might at some time be cast upon it, and all hands sailed with Captain Wilkins for Demerara, whence they took a ship for Boston, and thus ended Ben Bluff's last voyage, for he never went to sea again, having enough to do in looking after a lot of young grand nephews and nieces, the children of Jack and Dick Port, for, of course, the two lively young fellows married Kitty and Ida Waters, and are as happy as the day is long.

[THE END.]

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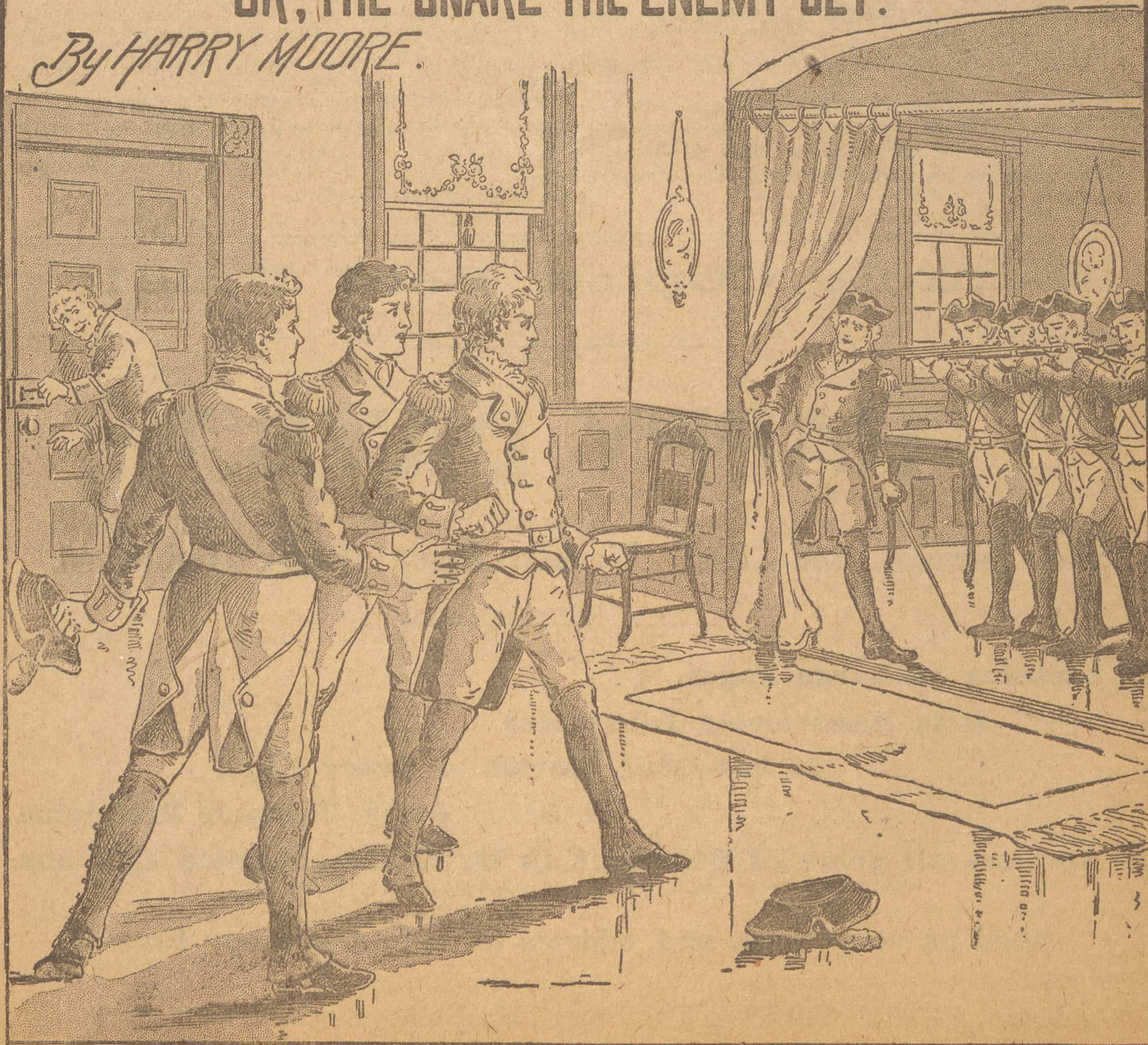
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